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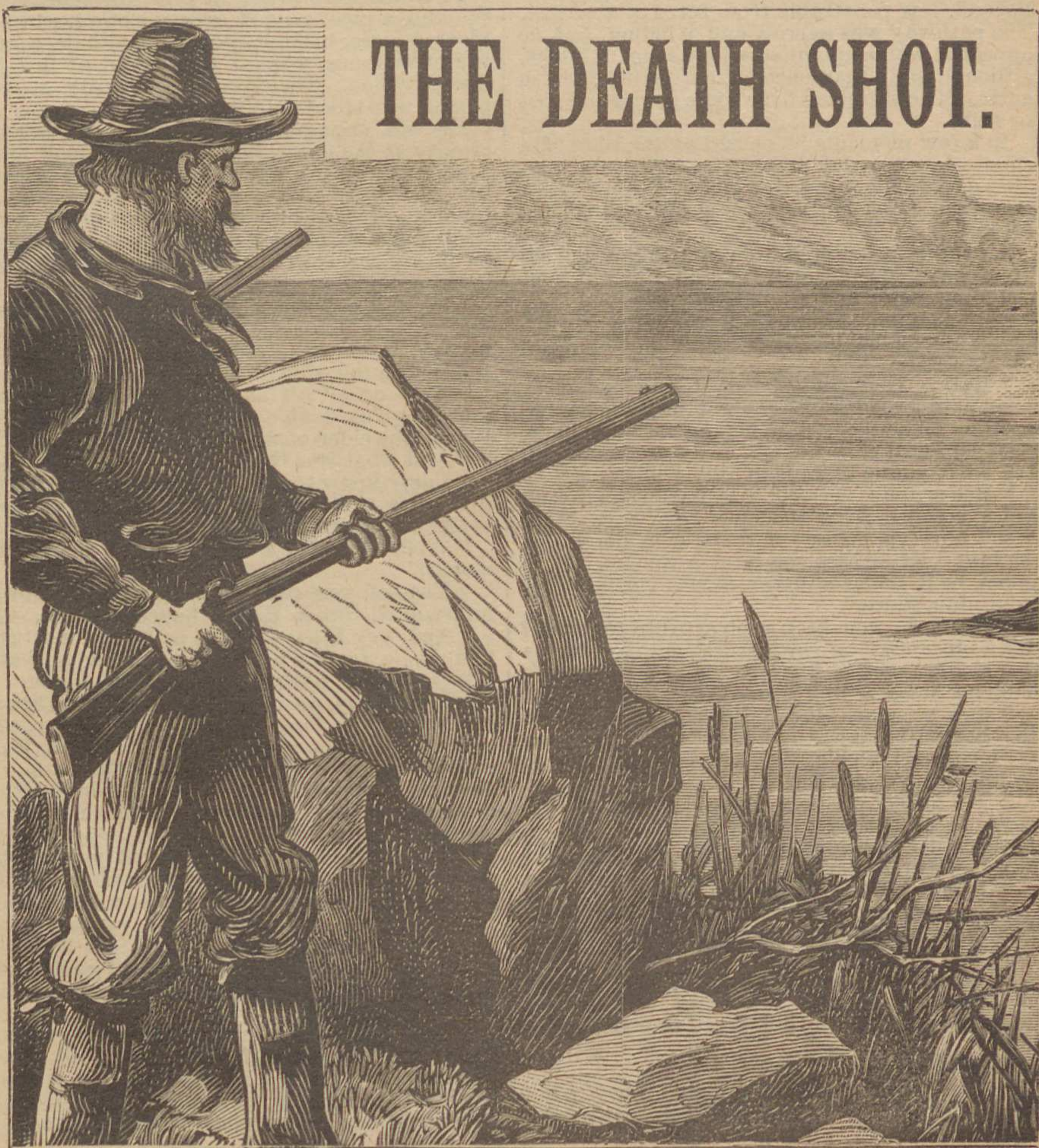
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Mink Coat, THE DEATH SHOT;

OR,

The Spring of the Tiger.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,
AUTHOR OF "ROUND THE CAMP FIRE," "THE
COLORADO BOYS," "THE TIGER
HUNTERS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DARK NIGHT'S WORK.

A DARK form glided rapidly across the small moon-lighted space and entered the deep gloom beyond, less penetrable from force of contrast. The pathway was narrow and winding, but he appeared well acquainted with its meanderings, although more than once he muttered a peevish curse, as he stumbled over some projecting root or stub.

In a few moments he paused at the edge of a small clearing, and peered keenly before him. Just discernible, beneath a couple of huge trees, were the faint outlines of a diminutive log cabin.

As the man entered this clearing, a dog set up a bay: deep, sonorous and musical, yet sounding fierce and vindictive. The man half-paused as a huge object came bounding toward him, and one hand partially drew a pistol from his breast.

"Halloo, Hackney!" he cried, in a loud, clear tone, as a broad glare of light announced the opening of a door; "is this the way you greet friends? Call your dog off, or by my honor, I'll try what virtue there is in a blue pill!"

"Hee-er, pup, hee-er!" called a shrill, cracked voice, coming from the open doorway. "He won't hurt ye, mister, ef so be you don't fool 'th him. Ef he sees you tetch a we'pon, you're gone—he'll make another mouth right onder your chin, shore."

"What do you keep such a brute for, then? It's a nuisance," added the first speaker, as the dog slunk away, still growling and ominously showing its gleaming white fangs.

"He's a smart dog, he is. Don't make no fuss nor nuthin' at a honest feller. Takes you fer a rogue, I reck'n. I never knowed him to be mistook yet, nuther."

"Don't shoot off your mouth so much, Hackney. If he barked every time he saw a rogue, I fear you'd not have much time to sleep. But are the boys in there?"

"Gabe an' Si is. Them you mean?"

"Yes. Come, get out of the way and let me in. There's no time to spend fooling. Did you tell them what I wanted?"

"I sorter give them a hint; I didn't jestly onderstand you. All I knowed was 'at you 'lowed to git even 'th Cliff Ward to-night, somehow."

"And they seemed willing?"

"Wuss'n willin', a durned sight. They're hot on gittin' squar' 'th the imp fer thet scrape

t'other night. An' ef they kin git paid for doin' of it, why so much the better fer them," chuckled Hackney.

"You come in too, Hard. I count on your help."

"Four fellers on one leetle cuss? Oh, git out! You're foolin', ain't ye, now, say?"

"Come in. I will tell you what I wish done, and then you can decide whether you will help or not. At any rate, I know I can depend upon your silence; for if you speak, so can I," significantly added the man, as he entered the low door leading to a small back room.

It was small, as stated, scarcely more than ten feet square, without either door or window besides the one already alluded to, where now stood the two men. Near the center of this room was a rude table, upon which rested an old tin cup and a capacious black bottle.

Two men were sitting at opposite sides, each smoking a pipe: ragged, greasy clothes, whisky-bloated faces, bleared eyes, tangled hair, a belt full of weapons, was all that could at first be distinguished. They peered curiously at the person who stood before them.

He was young—did not seem over two-and-twenty at the most—but there was a look as of premature age in the thin, firmly-compressed lips, and steely-blue eyes. His dress was almost foppish; of fine broadcloth and snowy linen, while more than one jewel gleamed brightly as he moved beneath the dull rays of the rude hanging-lamp.

"Well, my friends, you are here on time, I see. Ready for a job?" he asked, in a low, musical voice, as he advanced and half-seated himself on the edge of the table.

"Yes—or ef it's as Hard Hackney yander hinted, we're double ready," growled Gabriel Burke, the elder of the two ruffians.

"And what was that?"

"I only know that Cliff Ward was mixed up in it. He said as how you hed a idee 'at he'd better be put out o' the way, fer a while."

"Well, and if I wanted you to do it, you would?"

"Yas—ef you paid us fer the work," slowly interrupted Simon Roach the second man.

"And yet I have had to pay you for letting him alone, for the past month. How is that?"

"Bizness is bizness, 'square, you know. A feller must live, an' he cain't hafe do thet 'thout the slum. So long as you paid us, we war willin' to let the banty go, but we'd a heap ruther clip his wings, ef so be it didn't stop our income. But what's the use o' gassin'? Come right out an' say what you want. You know you kin trust us."

"Yes, I do know that I can trust you, or else you would hardly know as much about me as you do. But never mind that now. Draw up close and I will tell you what I expect of you to-night. You promised to undertake it?"

"Yas. Seein' it's 'bout him, we'll go it blind. It cain't be none too hefty—this job," vindictively replied Gabe Burke.

"Well then, you know he is sweet on Lou Brady, old 'Slow Joe's' girl. And that is not the only way he has crossed me either; but never mind that now. I have found out—just how don't matter to you—that she is to meet

him to-night, at the broken oak, overlooking the river; you know where it is?"

"Bet yer life we do."

"Very well. We must be there, too. We will wear the old clothes and masks, for fear of being found out. You two—or three, for Hard will go too—must grab him, while I 'tend to the girl. After that you can do what you please; either settle his hash then, or take and keep him a close prisoner for a week or two, until my plan has time to work."

"What do you 'tend doin' 'th the gal, 'square?" asked Hackney, in a low tone.

"That does not concern *you*, Hard. I don't pay you for asking questions. You know I am struck, in that quarter, but she is not sensible enough to know what is best for her. She gives me the cold shoulder for Ward. I can't stand that, you know, and so I have sworn she should knuckle down in spite of herself. I will take her to a safe spot, and I warrant you, when she finds she can do no better, she will come to terms. Then when the storm blows over here, I'll bring her back and make it all up with Slow Joe."

"Take keer thet he don't make it *all up* 'th you, fust," muttered Hackney. "He'd shoot quicker'n a wink, thet cuss would. He don't know no better."

"I know that. But I can manage him. Well, there is no time to lose. Will you fellows take the job or not?"

"Fust—what'll we make by it? He's no chicken, Cliff Ward ain't," replied Simon Roach.

"One hundred apiece—big pay for an hour's work. Besides it's your revenge, too."

"Make it one-fifty."

"No. Not a cent more. Take it, or leave it. If you crawfish, I can find plenty more to take the job."

"Wal, it's a whack, boss. Seein' it's *you*, why we'll do it."

"Good! Hurry on the duds. Hackney, bring my dress."

In a few minutes the quartette were arrayed in dark clothes, with a closely-fitting cap, and beneath it a heavy black mask. Nothing of hair or features could be discerned through the disguise.

"Now boys come on. See that your weapons are ready, for you may have to use them. But remember. You are to take him to one side, out of the girl's sight, before you do anything. Then the money is yours if he never troubles me again."

"He'll take a pill an' then go swimmin', I reckon," chuckled Burke, as they glided rapidly along through the woods.

A half-hour of steady traveling brought them to the bank of the river, and then they proceeded cautiously up-stream. Then pausing, the leader renewed his instructions, after which he crouched low down and crept toward a large tree, standing upon a little knoll, overlooking the placid river.

The moon shone brilliantly down upon the two forms standing close together upon the greensward. One a man, the other a woman.

Both were bareheaded, and as the face of the woman was turned toward her companion, the

subdued light plainly revealed her countenance. And it was one of peculiarly striking beauty.

Above the medium bight, superbly formed, Louisa Brady was a magnificent woman, something above twenty years of age. A brunette of the purest type, she was deservedly styled the Belle of the Border.

An only child of old "Slow Joe" Brady, the hunter-trapper, she lived with him in a little log house, seemingly as happy and contented as a bird. The old man fairly worshiped her, and appeared to regard her as more than common flesh and blood.

It was a comely form standing beside her, so far as could be seen by the imperfect light, his face being cast in shadow. Tall and symmetrical, dressed in a rough suit of homespun.

It was indeed Cliff Ward, a young settler, who had won the first heart's love of the fair Louisa.

Then came a shrill whistle, that caused the lovers to start and glance around in vague alarm. But ere the young settler could draw the weapon his hand dropped upon, three strong pairs of arms clutched him and bore him struggling to the ground.

Another man grasped the maiden around the waist, and placed one hand firmly upon her lips, effectually checking utterance of the shriek of terrified surprise. And all this was done without a word being spoken upon the part of the assailants.

In a few moments the latter arose from the form of Cliff Ward, who now lay helplessly bound, and wholly at their mercy. So quick and adroit had been their actions that he had not a chance to offer resistance.

But now he spoke, his voice sounding hoarse with indignant surprise.

"What does this mean? Who are you, and what have I done that you should thus treat me like a dog? Speak out, if you are not afraid of a bound man!"

A hoarse chuckle from one of his captors was the only reply. Evidently the assailants did not care to speak.

Then Ward glared at the form of him supporting the almost fainting maiden. His teeth grated fiercely, and his voice sounded harsh with anger as he uttered:

"I might have known it. It is to *you*, Al Carpenter, that I owe this! Oh, you cowardly, treacherous cur! If my hands were only free, I would tear you limb from limb, but what I would wipe out this insult!"

"Easy, my friend, easy," laughed the other, but still with an air of chagrin at his disguise being penetrated. "Your tongue will run your neck into danger if you don't mind."

"It is you, then, Mr. Carpenter!" exclaimed Louisa, as she strove to free herself from his strong grasp. "I knew you were no gentleman, but I did not believe you quite so low and degraded as this! Release me, or—"

"Or what, my darling? No—no; I have waited my time long enough, and now it has come I will not spoil it like that. It is *your* time to plead to *me* now, and rarely shall you do it before we say quits. You laughed very

merrily at me when I told you the time would soon come when you would rue your words, that night. You thought it only the raving of a spoony lover. But I was not raving. I only lay quiet and let you run your length for a while. I am ready now, and, from this on, you must be content with *my* love making. Cliff will have other matters to occupy his attention, I fear," and he laughed a bitter, mocking laugh, that caused the maiden to shudder with a vague terror.

"Free my hands, coward, and I will make you eat those words! To threaten a woman! Bah!" hissed Ward, every muscle straining to its utmost tension in the vain endeavor to burst asunder his bonds of green rawhide, which only cut the deeper into his yielding flesh.

"He couldn't sot you free, ef so be he wanted to ever so bad, banty," chuckled Gabe Burke. "You're mine now—mine an' Si Roach's byar. We're goin' to rub out thet leetle a'count thet stands ag'inst your name in our log-books. Best say yer pra'rs, fer shure as yander moon shines down on you, it'll look at you givin' your last kick this night!"

"You hear—Mr. Carpenter!" gasped Louisa, in agony. "You hear what that man says! Do not allow this—tell me that you will not! I ask you, by the memory of your dead mother, not to do this crime!"

"You plead in vain, my love," replied Carpenter, in a tone that still sounded harsh and unnatural, for it was evident that her allusion to the dead had touched him in some manner. "His fate is settled. I could not save him if I would. He has injured those men, and must pay the forfeit. He would have suffered for it a month ago, but for me. I bought them off."

"He never did wrong—spare him! You can—I know it! Spare him, and I will bless you forever," pleaded the woman.

"No, I cannot—or *will not*, if that suits you any better. Do you think that I am a blind fool? I see that you love him, else you would sooner think of your own danger, and shall I give him his freedom so that he can win and wear you? No—a thousand times no! You are mine—now and forever! You did not know what was best for you, and laughed at me when I told you I loved you and sought you for my wife. You could have made a man of me then. You made a devil of me instead. It is my time to laugh now—ha! ha!"

"Do not plead for me, dearest Louisa," uttered Ward. "He is a devil as he boasts. But, Carpenter, if you harm her by so much as an evil word or look, you will rue it. I swear to have the last drop of your heart's blood for it, if I hunt a lifetime, and though you hide in the bowels of the earth, I will find you!"

"You are foolish, Ward. You will never see the sun rise again. I tell you your hours—nay, your very minutes of life are numbered. But before you go, rest easy regarding your sweetheart. She will be well cared for. She is to be my bride—willing or unwilling."

"This is all durned foolishness, 'square," gruffly broke in Simon Roach. "What's the use o' gassin'? Shell we fix the cuss now? I'm gettin' sleepy, an' want the job over."

"Yes. Take him away. You know what to

do, and where to meet me afterward. Take him off and do the job up well."

"In style, you bet!" grunted Burke.

"No—no, you must not—you shall not!" cried Louisa. "My God! will no one help us?"

"No, it is past help. Come, you must go with me unless you wish to remain here and see the last of your friend," brutally said Carpenter, as his strong arms wound closely about the trembling form.

The maiden shrieked wildly and struggled with supernatural strength. But she was held as in a grasp of iron.

"Choke the wench, 'square, or she'll hev the hull kentry on our backs," growled Burke, angrily, as he dealt Ward a fierce blow upon the head, to quiet his struggles.

Carpenter placed one hand rudely over his captive's mouth, and then all at once her powers gave way, and she hung a lifeless weight upon his arms. She had fainted.

"Hurry up, boys," muttered the leader. "Make a clean job of it and then follow me. Shoot or knife him, and then throw him into the river. Take off the cords first, though, for they may get us into trouble if he should be found too soon."

"All right. Kin you manidge her alone, or shell one o' us go 'long?"

"I can manage. Hurry up," and then bearing the still senseless maiden, Carpenter turned and glided rapidly away through the gloomy depths of the forest.

He heard a pistol-shot, quickly followed by a sullen splash in the waters of the river, and despite his hardihood, a cold tremor crept over his frame. Never before had he had blood upon his hands, unless shed in fair conflict.

CHAPTER II.

MINK COAT.

IT was high noon one day in midsummer. The sun had but recently passed the meridian. The songs of the birds were stilled, and all Nature seemed wrapped in a deathlike silence.

The almost vertical rays of the sun rendered even the forest depths uncomfortably warm. All seemed as if wrapped in an enchanted slumber.

But then the charm was broken. A human form came gliding into the little glade, and gave a quick, keen glance around him.

A human form—that of a white man; of a stalwart frame, but one bowed down as if with great sorrow or old age; no longer erect and faultless as of old.

His hair was long and snowy white, as was his heavy beard and mustache. The eyes were deep sunken, though glittering with an almost painful brightness. His face was thin even to emaciation, and of a ghastly, livid tinge, unpleasant to look upon.

He paused for a moment to peer keenly upon the ground before him. There lay a plain trail, evidently made but a very short time previously.

Two men had passed by, and one skilled in woodcraft would not have hesitated to pronounce them white men. And yet one of their own race and color was trailing them, with a

hungry glare in his wild eyes that boded them no good.

Then once more the old hunter set off along the double trail, stepping with the noiseless celerity of the velvet-pawed panther. Had the two first passers beheld him then, they might well have grown uneasy.

This strange hunter was none other than old "Slow Joe" Brady, the one alluded to heretofore as the father of Louisa Brady. The three years passed since that memorable night had sadly changed the genial-hearted old trapper.

Only upon the morning succeeding the tragedy had Louisa's absence been discovered, and then, rendered nearly frantic with fear and a dread of he scarcely knew what, Joe Brady set his faithful old dog—a hound of the purest breed—upon her track, an hour being spent in finding the right one.

Then as the dog paused beneath the broken-topped oak tree, with a howl of despair the old trapper set himself at work to learn the truth. He recognized several of the footprints; among them those of Carpenter and Cliff Ward.

He learned, as truly as if he had been an eyewitness of the entire occurrence, how the lovers had been surprised—the murder of the young settler—and then the flight with Louisa. He realized the bitter truth then.

He followed the trail until it again touched the river, where the parties had evidently taken to the water in a canoe. For another hour he searched for some trace of their progress, but in vain.

Then he aroused the neighbors, and for days and weeks the search was maintained for the missing maiden, but without success. By some means the abductors had learned how matters stood, and had fled, effectually covering their trail.

Then the settlers began to tire and drop off, one by one, until Joe Brady was left alone. Days, weeks, months and even years rolled by, and he did not despair of eventual success.

He scoured the country for leagues around, and finally reached the Miami valley, where he now was. In all this time—nearly three years—he had heard nothing of either Carpenter, Ward or his child.

With his eyes now dwelling upon the trail, broad and distinct as though the wayfarers had no thought of threatening danger, and now peering keenly around him, the old hunter glided forward. Suddenly he paused.

The faint sounds of a hoarse laugh had met his well trained hearing. And now the fiery glow deepened in his eyes, and a flush suffused his cheek. As he slowly crouched down, every muscle seemed to quiver like those of a wild beast about to launch itself upon some coveted prey.

It was now that the old hunter fully displayed the perfection of skill, learned by long and dangerous experience. He seemed to move by instinct, without an effort upon his own part, and though the undergrowth was here more than usually dense, not a twig snapped or a leaf rustled to betray his progress.

As he glided along the sounds of voices grew plain and more distinct. An increased glitter

of the eye told that Brady felt some great joy.

He believed that he recognized the voice of one whom he had not seen for three years. Of one for whom he had hunted long, believing that he could solve the mystery of the maiden's disappearance; the voice of Gabriel Burke.

Then the hunter paused and cautiously parted leaf by leaf of the dense screen before him, until he could peer forth upon the inmates of the little glade. He clinched his teeth upon his lips until the red blood trickled down his mossy beard, lest the long pent-up feelings should break forth in a wild cry of exultation.

He saw before him one of those who had been concerned in the abduction; the first one whom he had found during three years' weary, unceasing search. Gabriel Burke was before him, and although something changed in looks, was still sufficiently like for Brady to feel assured of his identity.

Beside him sat another man, both being engaged in eating a rude but substantial lunch of cold meat and corn cakes. Between them lay a capacious flask, half filled with an amber-hued liquor, that aided the cool, sparkling water of the woodland spring to wash down the viands.

The old hunter hesitated only for a moment.

His long rifle rose to his cheek with a deadly steadiness, and his keen gray eyes glanced along the clouded tube. The double sights bore full upon the exposed temple of the smaller man, for one brief moment.

Then the trigger was touched; the hammer fell; a clear report rung out upon the still air, followed by a single gurgling groan as the doomed man slowly sunk forward, the hot blood spouting from a tiny hole in his forehead.

Gabriel Burke uttered a wild cry, and springing to his feet, outstretched one hand for his rifle. But quick as was his action, it was too late to serve him.

A shrill, blood-curdling yell smote his hearing, and a dark form sprung out upon him, with marvelous agility. The next instant he staggered back, with what seemed a ferocious wild beast upon his breast—a vise-like grip fastened around his brawny throat.

In vain he struggled. Though nearly twice the size of his antagonist, he seemed a very infant in the hands of the avenger, strengthened with the fury of madness.

He staggered back, his foot slipped and he fell heavily to the ground. His face was horribly distorted, rapidly turning black, while his eyes were almost bursting from their sockets. Then his senses reeled and he fainted.

When he awoke to consciousness in a few moments, Burke found his assailant bending over him, laving his brow with the icy-cold spring water. In amazement he glared up at the haggard features; then he recognized the old hunter.

"Joe Brady!" he muttered, as he strove to raise a hand to his throat, that seemed on fire.

But in vain. He was securely bound with his own belt. Then the avenger hissed:

"Yes, I am Joe Brady. Where is my daughter—where is Lou? Tell me, or I will tear your black heart from your breast and thrust it down your throat."

"I don't know—how shed I?" faltered Burke, a grayish shade settling over his face as he noted the wolfish glitter of his enemy's eyes.

"Liar! you stole her away—you and that devil Al Carpenter. Tell me, or I will make you wish you had never been born!"

"I don't know—" and then Burke suddenly paused.

A peculiar gleam passed over his countenance—a ray of hope. As he lay upon the ground he heard a faint whistle and then the just discernible sound of footsteps approaching the spot. He knew that assistance was coming, alarmed by the death-shot and wild yell.

Did the avenger also hear it? No, one glance showed Burke that, and he resolved to keep him busy in mind, if possible, trusting yet to escape from the threatening peril.

"You won't blow on me ef I tell?" he added, quickly, in a loud tone. "He'd kill me ef he knowed I'd peached."

"He? who do you mean by *he*?" eagerly asked Brady, totally oblivious of all but the one great object to which he had devoted his life.

"Carpenter. You know he stole her?"

"Yes, I know. But where is she? Tell me—quick!"

"Not ten miles from hyar."

"Then she is alive?"

"Yes, in course she is! He didn't 'low to kill her, or I wouldn't 'a' had nothin' to do 'th it. I'm a rough cuss, I know, but I hain't so bad thet I'd hev anythin' to do with butcherin' wimmen."

"Bah! Don't prate, but tell me the truth. I believe you are lying, but I warn you that if I catch you deceiving me, your life won't be worth a grain of burnt powder. Now tell me the truth."

"I will—but don't be so durned hot. You've got me down, an' I must speak 'long the line. I tell you she's alive an' well, not ten miles from hyar."

"What is she doing there? If alive, why didn't she return home to me?" suspiciously added Brady.

"He wouldn't let her at fust, an' then as she got used to the life, mebbe she didn't want ter. Thar--don't fire up—I on'y said *mebbe*. Anyhow, she seems contented enough. 'Sides, he kept clus watch on the young 'un—"

"The--what?"

"The babby, you know. Al Carpenter he married her. They's got a babby, a leetle boy. Thet's what keeps her, I reckon."

"My God! 'tis as I feared, then!" groaned the father, as he sunk back and covered his face with his hands, while great scalding tears trickled through the rough, horny fingers.

The outlaw fairly trembled with excitement. He could hear the footsteps plainer, and to his preternaturally sharpened senses they sounded like the rumbling of thunder.

In his heart how he cursed the folly of those coming to investigate the cause of alarm. He accused them in his heart of willfully wishing his death.

Should the hunter hear them, there was yet time for him to deal a fatal blow, and still escape. Would he not do it?

The thought was horrible, and great drops of perspiration stood out upon the strong man's

brow while he suffered the tortures of a dozen deaths.

Suddenly he heard a faint, rustling noise close beside him, and glanced that way, scarcely able to repress a cry of joy. But what caused that sudden pallor? Why did he shrink back with that look of horror in his eyes? What caused his strong frame to quake and tremble as though attacked with a violent ague?

From the bushes a strange face looked down upon them; a face that seemed the collection of the heads of a small animal. Burke could see the gleaming white teeth, small and sharp; the bright bead-like eyes; the pointed snouts, and yet it all bore the shape of a human head.

He had never before beheld this being, although many were the tales he had hearkened to of its daring deeds and wondrous skill and cunning. He only knew that it had proved a terrible scourge to the band of which he formed one.

Some declared it a crazy white man, while others as positively affirmed it was an Indian. It had gained the *sobriquet* of "Mink Coat," from its dress being almost entirely formed from the skins of that animal, even to a large cap formed entirely from the heads, stuffed and prepared, with beads for eyes, the teeth all in place.

Such was the object that met the gaze of the outlaw, instead of a friend, as he anticipated. Now, more than ever he felt he was in danger.

"Mink Coat"—to call the strange being by the name he was generally spoken of—parted the bushes and stepped out into the glade, close beside the two men. He uttered a low cry that caused Joe Brady to spring erect, rifle in hand.

The trapper gazed curiously at the stranger. Nothing was visible of his face but the eyes, large and brilliantly black, shining with a peculiar glitter that impressed the beholder uncomfortably.

Not much, if any, beyond the medium hight, he was apparently well formed and muscular, although the fur garb detracted somewhat from the clear outlines of his figure. In his hand was a rifle; in the broad belt at his waist a knife, a small hatchet and a brace of pistols.

"Who are you—what do you want?" uttered Brady, apparently greatly amazed.

"A friend, and I would save your life. The wolves are coming, and they thirst for your blood. He is one of them," nodding toward Gabe Burke, who lay back, pale and trembling in every limb. "Load your rifle and trust in me. They fear Mink Coat, the Death Shot. Those dogs will flee at my laugh—ha! ha!"

Until this moment Brady had forgotten that his rifle was empty, and thus warned he quickly began recharging it. Aroused now from his abstraction, he could plainly distinguish the tread of approaching footsteps, and realized that danger threatened.

Mink Coat whistled low and softly, when a huge gray wolf glided from the bushes and crouched at his feet, its ears laid back, and long white fangs disclosed by the parted red lips, as its nose pointed in the direction from whence sounded the footfalls.

Then the bushes were dashed aside and a half-dozen men broke out into the glade. But they

suddenly paused at the strange sight that met their gaze.

A bound comrade lying beside the bloody corpse of another. Two men—one of them the dreaded Mink Coat—standing with leveled rifles covering their forms, while a huge wild beast crouched at their feet, every nerve quivering in readiness for the fatal leap.

No wonder they paused with cries of surprised alarm.

CHAPTER II.

WAZECOTAH, THE MIAMI.

AGAIN we ask permission to change the scene, as the proper development of our tale demands.

Upon a little knoll, surrounded upon three sides by a small farm under cultivation, stood the log cabin of Andrew Holmes. His family consisted of but three, besides himself. His wife, Minnie, his daughter, and Hardin Ellis, a young man who acted farm-hand, but if report spoke truly, he served in that capacity more from love than what profit he gained otherwise.

On the evening in question, they were still seated at the supper table, when a low rap sounded at the half-open door.

"Come in," cheerily called out Andrew Holmes, although not without a slight trace of uneasiness, rendered but natural by the troubled state of affairs that were fast approaching a crisis in that section of the country.

In answer, a tall dusky form stepped within the doorway, and stood as if waiting to be addressed. His dress and color proclaimed him an Indian; a connoisseur would have decided him a Miami brave of no mean rank.

"Oh, it is you, Wazecotah," cried Holmes. "You are as welcome as sunshine on a rainy day. Come, sit down and take a bite. We are about through, but there is enough to stay your hunger. Come, sit down."

"Wazecotah no got time now," responded the Indian, as he advanced a pace. "White fader hear news?"

"What news is that, chief? Is anything wrong?"

"Yeh, plenty wrong—all wrong! Injun git heap mad now. Dig up hatchet—tek plenty scalp bum-by. What you feel when got no scalp, eh? Like it plenty heap, eh?"

"What do you mean, chief?" said Holmes, approaching the savage, a look of alarm imprinted upon his manly features. "Do you mean that there is danger? Of the red-men troubling us, I mean?"

"Yeh, heap danger, all time. Plenty big heap now—lose scalp ef don't go 'way off from here. Bes' go—plenty soon. Go now, bum-by too late. When Injun come den can't go. Won't be let go. Un'stan'?" rapidly uttered the chief, in an earnest tone.

"Hardin, come see if you can understand him. You can talk their lingo. I fear there is trouble brewing for us."

"Chief," said Ellis, coming forward and speaking in the Miami dialect. "what is this? Shall there be a cloud between brothers?"

"No. Let my brother listen, and remember that a chief speaks. My people will not listen to the voice of reason any longer. They say the pale-faces must be driven from the land of

the Miami. They have dug up the war-hatchet and painted it red. Before another sun comes the land will be like day with the burning lodges where now sleep the white people; the earth will be drunk with their blood! Does my brother understand?"

"Yes. You mean your people are about to make war again. But surely they will not harm us? Whenever did a Miami pass by here, but he was kindly treated, and given whatever he needed? Is their memory so short that a single day can cause them to forget all this?"

"Yes. A cloud is over them. They do not know friend from enemy. At the council but one voted to spare this lodge; that voice was Wazecotah's. They said he was blind, and laughed at his words. They said that this night my white father must die. But Wazecotah swore in his heart that he would save them. The Silver Voice yonder saved the life of the chief when the fire-fiend was in his brain. Wazecotah swore to repay her kindness. The time has now come for him to make his word good. He comes to tell you that you must flee from here, for if you stay the great sun will only shine upon your dead bodies," solemnly uttered the Indian.

"Do they know you have come here? I mean your people?"

"No. If they did, Wazecotah would be degraded from his rank and cast out as unfit to live among men. But he could not let the Silver Voice perish. He will save her, for she was very kind to him."

Hardin briefly explained the tidings borne by the Miami, to Holmes, who received it with an air of doubt.

"I don't know. It don't seem right. We have done the tribe much service. They say an Indian never forgets a favor. But if what he says is true, then I could never trust another man. If they are treacherous, so may he be. Perhaps it is all a plot to get us out in the woods, where we cannot offer the resistance we can here, behind these stout walls."

The Indian listened to these words in respectful silence.

Evidently he understood English better than he could speak it.

When Holmes finished, he advanced, and taking the settler's hand, placed it upon his breast. Then he said in a gentle tone:

"Does my father feel the heart of a chief? Does it beat like that of a traitor? The Silver Voice saved the life of Wazecotah. He could not tell her a lie. He swears by the Great Spirit that he tells the truth. If my father doubts the word of Wazecotah let him strike. See! the Miami's breast is broad, but a knife can touch his life. Strike hard. He would rather die than have his father think such evil things of him."

"You can trust him, father," cried Minnie, coming forward. "I know he will not lie to us. He could not, with that face."

"Wazecotah is proud that the Silver Voice believes him. Listen. He will prove his truth. He will stay here—you can hide his weapons if you fear him—and when his peo-

ple come, he will bid them begone. If they do not obey the words of their chief, then he will die before harm comes to his friends. He cannot lift a hand or arm against his people, but they must kill him before they touch you."

"No, chief, forgive me, I do not doubt you any longer. I was a fool to do so, even for a moment. But tell us what we must do. Is the danger really so great?" asked Holmes, grasping the hand of the friendly Indian warmly.

"Yeh, big heap danger, fo' you. Miami come when moon goes down—kill—burn—tek' scalp. You stay here, git kill. Bes' go 'way off—hide in woods till Injin git tired. Den come back. If kin git to log house down ribber—good. Injun no hurt dere. Lodge too big. Don't like thunder guns. But mus' go. Git kill big plenty ef don't go."

"But can we? Won't they find us in the woods?"

"Mebbe so—t'ink not, dough. Don't tek' hosses—mek' too much noise. Go out to ribber—git in canoe, den creep 'long shore. Don't go out in light, an' Injun won't see you. Mus' go plenty quick, dough. Bum-by be too late—den no use. What fader say? he go?" anxiously queried Wazecotah.

"Yes, we will go. God have mercy on us if you are deceiving us! But I won't think of that. Yes, we will go. But the boat—where will we find one? Ours is broken."

"Know where big black rock is? Here tree—all white—no limbs. Fire-spirit mek' um so. Dere rock—here canoe. Wazecotah put um dere. Kin find um, t'ink?"

"He means near the lightning-blasted oak, Holmes. I know the place. Yes, chief, we can find it. Then you think we will be safe on the river?"

"Yeh—know so, fo' sure. Miami won't go dere. Ribber got no scalp. But mus' walk plenty quick an' still, all same like pant'er. Injun he got heap big ear when on war-path."

With a few more instructions the Indian turned and left the building. The excitement, though in a measure subdued and kept within bounds, was very great at the cabin.

It was a danger that they had foreseen for some time, although they had tried to blind themselves to it, by recalling their excellent terms with the savages in general, whom they had ever made a practice of treating kindly. But now it had come upon them, in a manner unawares, and they were fearful of the worst.

It was no time to take thought of their worldly goods, and yet not one of the little party but what felt a pang at the thought of abandoning the home, perhaps forever, that had become so endeared to them from long association, together with a thousand other objects.

The chief had told them not to attempt flight by means of horses, for although time might be thus gained, the risk of discovery would be doubled. And within a half-hour from the time of the chief's departure, the settlers turned their backs upon their rude but loved home, and entered the wilderness with light, cautious steps, but heavy, foreboding hearts.

They only have weapons, food and some

necessary articles of clothing. The rest was abandoned to the hands of the ruthless savages.

They paused at the edge of the woods, and turning, gazed back toward the little log hut with yearning hearts. The women wept audibly, and even the men, strong and stern as they thought themselves, felt a tear dim the brightness of their eyes and a choking sensation rise to their throats.

"Come," at length muttered Holmes in an unsteady tone; "this is idle folly. We must improve every moment, for, if the chief is to be believed, the Indians may come at any moment."

Taking the arm of his wife he led the way, closely followed by Ellis and Minnie. And thus perhaps a mile had been traversed, when the elder settler suddenly paused, with an exclamation of chagrin.

"I've left my knife at the house!"

This was a serious loss, and one that could be replaced by only one means. That was by returning for it; and yet there might be great danger in doing so, should they separate, to both parties.

"I will go back after it," said Hardin. "Do you remember where you left it?"

"No—but I think on the mantle over the fireplace. But you stay here. I will go and find it. Or perhaps you had better keep on toward the river. It might be safest."

"No, Andrew," said his wife, "not without you. We will wait here. But why go at all? Surely it is not worth the risk!"

"Indeed it is—not that I fear any danger, though. It will only take a few minutes. I'll hurry back."

As he spoke the settler started off upon the back trail at a rapid pace, and speedily vanished from view. The three fugitives withdrew a little to one side of the path, and anxiously awaited the return of their friend.

Minute after minute rolled by, and still the settler did not return. It was a time of most trying suspense to all, and though they strove to hope for the best, dire forebodings would assail their hearts, despite this resolution.

"My God! why don't he come?" groaned Mrs. Holmes, in agony, as fully an hour had elapsed since her husband's departure. "They have killed him—I know it!"

"No, I think not. Holmes would have made some alarm first. He is detained by something unexpected. Perhaps he could not find the knife as readily as he thought," replied Ellis; but he did not feel the hope his words expressed.

"I can stand it no longer—I must go to him! He is hurt—I know it! He would never stay so long, if all was well."

"No, you must not do that. If you wish it, I will go find him."

"You will get killed too, Hardin," murmured Minnie, agitatedly.

"No, I will be upon my guard. But come a little further out here, where it is safer. Now do not move or speak aloud until I return. There is no telling who may hear you. You promise, Minnie?"

"Yes, but hasten back, and be careful, very careful. I should die if any thing happened you!"

"God bless you, darling!" murmured Hardin, as he clasped the trembling form tightly to his heart, and pressed his lips warmly to hers. "If only for your sake I would be cautious. But never fear. I will return all safe, bringing your father with me."

Then the young settler turned, and regaining the path, strode rapidly, yet noiselessly along toward the deserted cabin, resolved to learn the fate of the borderer, at all risks. And yet he was firmly persuaded that Andrew Holmes was, either dead or alive, in the power of the Miamis.

As he glided along, Ellis kept a keen watch around and before him, and at short intervals, pausing to hearken if the returning footsteps of the settler could be distinguished. But nothing save the usual night sounds of the forest greeted his ear or sight, until he had traversed fully half the intervening distance to the log cabin.

Then Hardin fancied he heard a cautious footfall before him, apparently approaching his position. Pausing abruptly, Ellis felt almost certain that his surmise was correct; that but a few yards separated him from some human being, either a friend or an enemy.

For full a minute he stood motionless, but then fearing to waste any more precious time he ventured to speak, in a low, guarded tone.

"Holmes, man, is that you?"

No reply came, and then he repeated the call, in louder tones. At length convinced that he had deceived himself, Ellis glided forward. As he passed the spot from whence the sound, if any, had proceeded, he paused and peered around among the bushes; but found nothing.

Then the young settler pressed onward, nearing the deserted cabin. All at once a cold thrill pervaded his frame, and involuntarily he paused.

Hardin fancied that he heard stealthy footsteps behind him. *That he was being followed either by man or beast!*

But nothing further sounded from the suspected point. All was silent as the grave. And it still remained thus, as Hardin glided noiselessly along, listening for the sound to be repeated, his rifle in readiness for instant use.

He heard nothing more of the sound, however, and soon reached the edge of the clearing. His heart gave a wild throb, as he first gazed out upon the open, moonlighted space.

The log house still stood, dark and gloomy, looking as though not visited since their first departure. But where was Andrew Holmes?

Could it be that he had been there, and had already left? If so, why had not Hardin met him upon the trail? Could he have taken another route?

That was not likely, as this was the plainest and most direct. Puzzled and perplexed, Ellis resolved to visit the house, and see if any clew could be gathered there.

With a swift glance around him, he turned and ran lightly along over the beaten path. This was not perfectly straight, and along its sides the grass was a foot or more in height.

All at once the young settler uttered a little

cry, as his foot struck against a soft, yielding mass, and with a desperate effort to recover his balance, Ellis fell at full length. One hand touched a peculiar slimy substance that there could be no mistaking. *It was a mass of coagulated blood!*

With an involuntary cry of horror, Hardin sprung to his feet, wiping his hand with a shudder. As he turned to glance at the body, a wild yell broke forth upon the still night air, sounding from the woods at a point near where he had just emerged, and from the dazzling flash that spouted forth, a couple of bullets hissed uncomfortably close to his head.

There was no time to lose, but still he cast another glance at the corpse. His worst fears were realized; it was the lifeless form of Andrew Holmes, stabbed to the heart, and with the scalp torn from his head!

All this passed with the rapidity of thought. From the time Hardin Ellis fell, not a half-score of seconds had elapsed. And now he realized his own peril.

As if in answer to the yells of the savages who had fired at the young settler, a dozen cries pealed forth from around the clearing's edge, and as many dusky, half-nude forms sprung out into the moonlighted space. A cordon of death seemed to encircle the borderer.

A quick glance showed him this, and told him that only one hope remained. And that hope—ah! what a faint one was it!

The house now was his only chance of refuge. If it were occupied by the enemy, then all he could do would be to sell his life as dearly as possible. He could not hope to escape by flight.

And so, toward this refuge, Hardin Ellis sprung, nerved to desperation, sending back a defiant yell in answer to those of fiendish exultation that echoed from a score of throats. The foe was closing in upon him, and it would be a tight race as to which would reach the goal first.

With wondrous fleetness Hardin traversed the hundred yards, and reached the building not a score yards in front of his yelling pursuers. As he sprung against the door, it suddenly opened, and Ellis felt himself clasped tightly in the arms of a man—an Indian!

A wild, exultant yell sounded in his ears, as his form was twisted to the floor by his antagonist, with as much seeming ease as though he had been an infant. Then a strong hand clutched his throat—a heavy knee was placed upon his breast, and a bright knife-blade gleamed before his eyes! Death stared him in the face!

CHAPTER IV.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST.

THIS tableau did not last long, without change. The outlaws were speedily given better cause for alarm than the mere sight of Mink Coat. That worthy uttered a cry, deep and ringing, but horrible from the deadly, vindictive hatred it shadowed forth.

His rifle spoke, followed like an echo by that of Slow Joe. Two of the outlaws never knew what had hurt them; ere their eyes could note the flash, or ears the report, a brace of bullets crashed through their brains.

Their fall was greeted with another cry from the Death Shot; shrill and peculiar. It seemed a signal to the wolf, who, with a grating snarl, sprung forward like a lightning bolt.

The victim it had selected threw forward his rifle, but it was dashed aside like a feather, and then the vise-like jaws closed upon his throat, the wolf greedily drinking his life-blood. That aroused the surviving outlaws from their species of stupor, and with wild cries of horror, they turned and fled from the spot of death, as quickly as feet winged by terror could carry them.

Mink Coat cast aside his rifle, and drawing his pistol, darted forward in rapid pursuit. Mechanically Joe Brady followed in his lead, for the time totally forgetting his prisoner.

Swift-footed as the old hunter was, he soon found himself distanced by Mink Coat, and then above the trampling of feet he heard a pistol-crack, accompanied by a shrill cry as of awful agony, telling how true had been the aim of Death Shot. Shortly after, Brady paused beside a writhing body.

It was one of the outlaws, shot through the body, his back broken. The old man paused and gazed down upon the groaning wretch, a strange expression resting upon his countenance.

He recognized the man, despite his distorted features. It was one of those who had so wronged him years before. Simon Roach had met his punishment at last.

Brady strove to recall the senses of the dying man, with questions of the past, but in vain. No gleam of recollection appeared at the sound of the ill-fated Louisa's name.

Then with one gasping groan—a horrible spasm of agony, all was over. The outlaw was dead.

Still Joe Brady stood beside the body, a vacant look upon his face, as he leaned heavily upon his rifle. He had forgotten the present; his mind was busied with the past.

For full an hour he stood thus, and was only aroused by the appearance of Mink Coat and his hideous follower, the wolf, from whose lolling jaws drops of bloody foam trickled. Then a glow of recollection shot athwart the wrinkled visage of the old hunter, and he said:

"That man—Gabe Burke—I forgot him!"

"Yes, he must die, too. All of them must die—die like the dogs they are! Come—I will kill him—I and Beauty, here. He hates them, too; I taught him. Come, I am thirsty—very thirsty, and nothing save blood will quench it. And it cools my brain—it is good, very good, this blood—when it comes from the heart veins of those men!" cried Mink Coat, and as Brady glanced at the Death Shot, even his seared brain read the truth.

The famed Mink Coat—the dreaded Death Shot—was a maniac. There was no mistaking that fiery glitter in the large black eyes. Despite himself, the old scout shuddered.

He felt that he would be no more than an infant in the maniac's grasp, should he, by some freak, consider him an enemy. And yet the old hunter felt a strong attraction toward the stranger, that he could not account for. It seemed as though he had known him at some

bygone period of their lives, under very different circumstances.

"No, you must not kill him," slowly said Brady, his keen eyes gazing full into the glowing orbs of Mink Coat. "At least, not until I have learned something of him. He stole my child years ago, and I want to learn her fate; whether she is alive or dead. After that, I do not care. You may work your will with him."

"He has injured me, too, somehow. I don't remember just what it was; my brain is not so clear as it used to be. It feels light and dizzy, just as though it was drunk. Does your brain ever get that way? Mine does, often; ever since they killed me. Were you ever dead?" rambled Mink Coat, as they walked through the forest.

"No, I never was," mechanically replied Brady, unheeding the words he uttered; his mind, as usual, dwelling upon the past.

"I have been—they killed me once. He was one of them. They shot me and then made the cold water run over me until I was drowned; I think that was it. Then they got frightened and ran away. I was tired and slept a long time—years and years, I guess—and then I woke up again. Something kept whispering in my ears to be a man and avenge—not me. I forget what it was now. Something very dear that they stole away from me, I know. My heart, maybe; I have none now. It is only a lump of ice. But it burns, too, whenever I try to recollect what I used to be. Then I lie down on the cool, green grass, and pray that I may die again, and sleep forever!"

The strange being allowed his voice to die gradually away, although he still continued wild ravings, beneath his breath. Still, true as a bloodhound upon a breast-high scent, he kept the trail that led back to where they had left Gabe Burke a prisoner.

As they entered the little glade, a wild cry of angry surprise broke from the old hunter's lips. He saw the dead and silent forms of the slain outlaws; but where was the living one?

He had vanished, leaving naught behind him save the traces where he had lain. By some means he had slipped his hands from the belt, freed his feet and then fled, fearing to await the return of his dreaded enemies.

"He is gone—fled! Cursed fool that I am! to have left him alone without wringing the truth from his lips. The clew was in my hands, and I let it go. A thousand curses on my blind folly!" raged Brady, stamping his foot in mad fury.

Mink Coat gazed steadily at the old hunter for a moment, a wondering look in his luminous eyes. Then he spoke, in a low, gentle tone, that caused Brady to start and tremble:

"What is it the gray-head wished to know? Why does he cry because a black-hearted dog has gone away? Does he love that bad man?"

"No—no, I hate him! But he was one of those who stole away my child—my Louisa—and I would have made him tell me where she was hidden at. And now—the hard work of three years is all undone!"

"Louisa—Louisa! I have heard that name somewhere. It sounds like music in my ear, and it makes my brain whirl. Tell me what this

means, old man? Who am I?" muttered Mink Coat, peering eagerly into Brady's face.

"I do not know—how should I?" wearily responded the old man, bowing his head; the disappointment being almost too much for his worn and shattered mind to sustain.

"Don't cry—it hurts my heart to see you cry! It is not like a lump of ice any longer when you cry—I would rather it was. It don't hurt then like it does now. Don't cry any more, and I will help you to find this bad man. Or this—who did you say? Louisa? I will find her for you if you would rather. I can find her, never fear. I will ask the birds of the air to hunt for her. They obey me—I am their king!" muttered Mink Coat, his eyes sparkling with the lurid fires of insanity.

"You will help me—you can find him—her?" eagerly cried Brady, his shattered mind catching greedily at the idea.

"Yes, I will help you. Come, let us follow his trail. If he walked on the ground, though with steps as light as a feather-fall, Beauty here will find him. If he floated through the air, any bird will show us the right way."

Greatly encouraged by the rambling assurances of his companion, poor Brady sought around until he found the trail of Gabe Burke, and then the strange trio plunged once more into the woods, following upon the outlaw's track. That worthy had been in by far too great a hurry to use care in his flight.

He dreaded the return of his foes, and as soon as he worked his hands free, he loosened the bonds of his feet and then fled at hot speed. So his trail lay broad and distinct before them; one that required but little skill to trace out.

Along this, then, the trio pressed, Beauty, the wolf, leading the way, as if by scent. After a short stretch to the right, the trail made an abrupt turn to the left, at right angles, thus running parallel with the road over which Mink Coat had chased the outlaws.

For nearly two miles this was traced up, when Mink Coat suddenly paused, checking the wolf by means of a slight hiss. Perfectly trained, the brute crouched low down and remained motionless as a statue of stone.

A peculiar sound was heard; truly a strange one in that wild and lonely spot. Low and mournful, yet indescribably sweet, came the softly uttered notes of a song, in the unmistakable tones of a woman.

Mink Coat turned his head and glanced toward Brady, who was leaning forward, his lips parted—his head turned to one side—his eyes shining like balls of fire; in most acute attention. He had heard that same song often in times gone by; it had been his favorite, and of an evening, after a long day's tramp through the wilderness in quest of game, he would lie upon the little grass plot before the cabin door, pipe in mouth, dreamily listening to the full, sweet tones of his daughter as she sung it; she, his lost child!

"I told you I would find her," muttered Mink Coat, exultantly.

Brady did not speak. His heart was too full of sweet and bitter memories conjured up by those mournful notes. He bowed his head upon

his hands and sunk to the ground, his form trembling like a storm-tossed shrub.

But then he sprung erect, a wild fire glowing in his eyes, an expression of horror distorting his features, now livid and ghastly. For a moment it seemed as though his brain would burst, so hot and heavy did his heart's blood flow there.

But with an effort that left him weak and trembling, he subdued this feeling, and turned toward the glade. He had heard a childish treble utter the word "*mamma*," and then came a gleesome laugh of infantile joy.

Then the words of Gabe Burke came back to him with terrible force. He felt that this was the voice of *her* child—of *his*, the ruthless abductor, Albert Carpenter.

A slight hiss met his ear, and as he glanced around, Brady saw Mink Coat crouched low down, one hand half-poising his rifle, while the other was wound in the long matted hair of Beauty, who was uttering a low grating snarl, and ominously showing its long gleaming fangs. The eyes of the Death Shot were riveted upon a portion of the woods a little to the left of his present position.

Joe Brady caught sight of several dusky figures stealing cautiously through the bushes, peering eagerly toward the point from whence still sounded the sweet song. It was evident that as yet they were unconscious of the presence of the two rangers, for though using so much caution, their forms were fully revealed to view.

As if paralyzed, Brady glared at them, while they advanced with the noiseless caution of serpents. Then they paused—five of them—behind a fallen tree, whose huge trunk was overgrown with bushes and clustering vines.

After peering through the leafy screen for a moment, they slowly raised their rifles and leveled them toward the glade, where the song was now stilled, although the low sweet voice could be heard conversing with the shriller-toned child. But then a motion of Mink Coat aroused Brady.

The former quickly raised his rifle and fired, uttering the yell that had become so fearfully known, now mingled with one scarcely less horrible, as a death-stricken red-skin flung up his arms, falling backward, shot through the temples. Then Mink Coat sprung forward, preceded by Beauty.

Brady—now thoroughly awakened from his stupor—flung up his long rifle with the precision of old, and added his contribution to the surprise. Then he also sprung forward.

But the surprised Indians did not await for this. They heard the voice—recognized the form of the dreaded Death Shot, and thought only of flight. It was not in savage nature to boldly confront one—unless in overwhelming numbers—of whom such fearful tales had been told.

Turning, they fled affrighted through the forest—all but three. Two were already stiffening in the embrace of death; the third was writhing furtively beneath the huge form of Beauty, whose grinding jaws were tearing furiously at his throat.

Shrill screams arose from the little glade, and the mother grasped her child and fled, together with the one man detailed to guard them. And as if echoes, hoarse cries arose almost directly in the path taken by the alarmed savages.

Despairingly, they abruptly veered to the left, and still sped on, their steps quickened by a volley of rifle-balls, discharged by the outlaws collected by Gabe Burke and those surviving the conflict with the two rangers and their four-footed ally.

Mink Coat paused and arrested the steps of Joe Brady. Then another cry told that they also were discovered, and a half-score sturdy, well-armed men set out in hot pursuit.

Resistance with empty weapons was not to be thought of, and knowing this, the two men turned and fled, followed by Beauty, who glanced often over her shoulder, viciously snarling and showing her teeth in rage; but obedient to the cry of her master, she resisted the desire to assault those she had been trained to hunt.

Mink Coat began adroitly to load his rifle, as he ran, showing great skill in the act, owing to the thickly growing underbrush. In five minutes the weapon was charged, and wheeling, with a quick aim, another blow was dealt for vengeance.

A cry went up among the pursuers at this act. Evidently they recognized their foes, for loud among the chorus were the names of MINK COAT—DEATH SHOT.

CHAPTER V.

A DIRE MISHAP.

WE left our young friend, Hardin Ellis, in a far from enviable situation. Truly he seemed doomed to death beyond a hope of escape.

Helpless, in the grasp of a savage far more powerful than himself, whose sinewy fingers were wound tightly around his throat, whose knee pressed heavily upon his chest, whose strong right arm was raised aloft, clutching the knife that gleamed as if thirsting for human blood, its point directed toward his throat; while from beyond, a score of red-skins came dashing up to the door, with loud yells of exultation at seeing their victim run so blindly into the trap.

No wonder the young settler gave himself up as lost, and a cold chill crept over his frame as he thought of the helpless ones awaiting his return in the forest, now doubly bereaved. Though life was sweet, his only thought now was for them. If he died, they were assuredly doomed!

For a brief instant the glittering knife hung suspended in air; then it swiftly descended, with a dull, heavy *thud*!

Despite the strong grasp upon his throat, Ellis uttered a groan as a subtle pain shot through his neck.

"Hoo!" grunted the savage, as he partially arose, holding up the crimsoned knife in the bright moonlight that streamed in at the open door; "the long-knife was a fool! He runs with his eyes shut. But he has got a good scalp. Wazecotah thanks him."

"Wazecotah's arm is strong and his knife sharp. Is the pale-face dead?" asked one of the savages.

"Let Sakima look," tersely replied the chief, as he pointed to the gory neck of the young hunter. "Wazecotah only strikes once. But this only makes two. There are more. Let my children go and search again. Wazecotah will stay here to stop them if they come to the lodge. When Wanou comes, send him here; it is nearly time."

Without another word the savages turned away and left the building, bound upon the task set by their leader, who then closed the door and silently barred it before turning once more to his prisoner.

"My brother can open his eyes now. There is no one here to listen to the words of a dead man," grimly remarked Wazecotah, as he stooped over Ellis and assisted him to rise.

The young settler yet trembled from the severe trial he had undergone, for until the blow was delivered he believed his doom to be sealed beyond a doubt. Until then he had not recognized his assailant.

When the keen knife hissed through the air, he had caught a peculiar glance from the eyes of his antagonist, and recognized the chief. But the shock of the keen blade slitting open the skin of his throat, when driven with such force, had in a manner stunned him, and allowed him time to comprehend the intentions of Wazecotah.

Reading the look aright, he had feigned death, trusting all to the chief. As we have seen, thus far he had had no cause for regretting doing so.

"I must thank you, chief," muttered Hardin, as he rose and clasped the Indian's hand, "that I am not really a dead man—like my poor friend out yonder!" he added, with a shudder.

"Wazecotah would have saved him, too, if he could. But he did not see him until a knife was deep in his heart and his scalp hanging at the belt of a brave. Wazecotah would have died for him rather than this should have happened," gloomily responded the Miami.

"Tell me how it came about, chief," added Hardin. "Where were you? He trusted you, like he would me. Ah's me! I little thought of this when we—you and I, chief—used to come home from our long hunts, to find food and a warm welcome from him who now lies out yonder, dead and scalpless!" brokenly muttered the young settler, his eyes dimmed with tears at the thought of his comrade's unfortunate end.

"The heart of Wazecotah is very sad. It almost makes him a squaw. But it was not his fault. He would have given his own life rather than have had the Gray Head harmed. But the Great Spirit willed that it should not be so. Why did he return? Had he listened to the words of Wazecotah he would have been alive and well now instead of where he is."

Ellis briefly detailed the reasons of the settler's return, and then heard an account of the ending. Holmes had entered the clearing without pausing to reconnoiter, and was met by one of the Indians who had hidden in the grass, and stabbed to the heart ere he could use a weapon or utter a cry.

After warning the settlers, unknown to him

people, Wazecotah had started to return to the village, but striking a trail that he recognized, heading toward the lone cabin, he had followed it, so that, should his suspicions of their intentions to attack his friends be true, he could effect a delay, and thus facilitate their escape. But he did not overtake them until just as they separated to surround the building.

Then he bade them pause, saying he would advance alone to learn if the inmates were asleep, intending, were they still at home, to enter and cast his fates with theirs. He meant to redeem his word even at the cost of life itself.

But as we know he found the whites gone, and after being fully satisfied of this, he had returned to his men. They separated in order to find the trail and thus learn the general direction in which they could most likely find their intended prey, while Wazecotah busied himself in obliterating all traces along the path that he knew the fugitives must have taken.

Unfortunately there was a division in this, the two trails running parallel for over a hundred yards, at not more than twenty apart. Not knowing along which one the fugitives had passed, Wazecotah began to brush along one, when Andrew Holmes silently passed him by means of the other.

He heard the subdued exultant yell of the savage, who had slain the unfortunate settler, but too late to afford Holmes any protection. He could only disguise his feelings, an expression of which could do no good, and might place it beyond his power to save any others.

Believing that Holmes had merely returned for some forgotten article—the only solution he could arrive at, under the circumstances—Wazecotah reasoned that he would be sought after, as his people would hardly abandon him without. So he gave his men orders to allow any one approaching to pass by the cabin, unharmed, where he would intercept and either kill or capture them.

How true was his reasoning, and how adroitly he had played his difficult part, the reader has already seen.

"I thank you, Wazecotah," said Hardin Ellis, after the chief had explained; "but that is not all. I must return to our friends. Without some one to guide them they will be lost. Can you draw off your braves so that I can pass by them?"

"No, not yet. Wanou is to meet us here. He is a greater chief than Wazecotah, and the Miamis will not dare to disobey him. He said wait here until he came; they must do it."

"Then I can try a run for it. They can only kill me, and better that in trying to save those who trust in me, than life at their cost. I must save them or die!" cried Ellis, hotly, his hand upon the bar of the door.

But he was checked by the chief, who drew him back.

"Listen! Wazecotah will do better than that. He will make a Miami warrior of his pale-faced brother. Then he can walk openly to his friends. Does Squirrel Foot understand?"

"You mean to paint me like one of your men?"

"Yes. They will not know you. You can

speak the tongue of the Miamis well. If any of them asks your name, tell them you are Petalesha, and bring me word from Keoxa. They will not stop you; Petalesha is dead, though they do not know it."

While he spoke, Wazecotah was assisting Hardin to remove his outer garments, and then, with an adroit and cunning hand, aided by the bright moonlight that streamed in at the window, he colored the white skin to a savage hue, and afterward various symbolical figures. The long hair of the settler was twisted into a knot upon his head, and an eagle plume from the chief's head-dress thrust through it.

Then Wazecotah stepped back, uttering a low grunt of satisfaction at the transformation thus effected. With his fair knowledge of the Miami dialect, Hardin could safely have passed through a far more close scrutiny than he was likely to experience upon this occasion.

"Will it do, chief?" anxiously asked Ellis, greatly excited, but far more because of the lives of the loved ones depending, mainly upon him, than from personal fear.

"Yes! Had not my hand painted you, I would call you Red Crow—Petalesha, the Miami. You could deceive even Onekato his favorite squaw!" replied the chief, with a grim smile.

"Very good, then. Your hand, chief, and forgive me if when I found *him*, I believed you a traitor. The cloud is gone now, and I will trust you," said Ellis, warmly, as he clasped the Indian's hand, pressing it firmly.

"It is good. There should be no clouds between friends. Do not let the Silver Voice think black thoughts of Wazecotah. He would have died to save her father, if he could."

"I know it—I believe you, brother. I will tell her your words. But now I must go. We will strike for the river and then keep down with it. Your braves will not come that way?"

"No, not if I can keep them away. But if Wanou tells them go, I will leave them and find you in time. Now go, by the back window is best. It is dark there, and you can creep to the woods without being seen as coming from the lodge."

Time was too precious for more than a single handclasp, and then the two friends parted. Hardin slipped out through the window, bearing his clothes rolled in a compact bundle, intending to resume them when once safe beyond the lines of the war-party, and enter the woods without being challenged, although he saw the dusky form of more than one brave, peering keenly at him.

Making a considerable detour he again reached the requisite path, and then strode along, with more rapidity than was exactly consistent with prudence. But his mind was too ill at ease in thinking of what terrors the two helpless women must have undergone during his long absence after hearing the noise of firing, for him to choose his footsteps.

Suddenly he heard an exclamation and a tall form uprose in the narrow path before him. From a rift through the tree-top, the bright moonlight shone down upon them both, quite plainly revealing their features.

Hardin saw that he was confronted by an Indian—a Miami—and felt that his disguise

was about to be put to the test. And hidden by the bundle, one hand cautiously sought his knife-hilt, in case the worst should come.

"Where is my brother going, so fast?" demanded the true savage, bending forward and peering keenly into the face of the counterfeit Miami.

"He has been to Wazecotah," boldly replied Ellis, in the same dialect. "He carried the chief word from Keoxa. He takes back word to his chief, and is in haste. The path is long before him and Keoxa is hot-tempered. Petalesha wishes his brother good-night."

"Stop!" cried the Indian, barring the way, as Hardin would have passed him. "Are names so scarce among the Miamis that a live dog should steal that of a dead brave? Who are you that steals the name and paint of my dead brother—Petalesha?" he added, fiercely, as he half drew his hatchet.

"One who sends you to join your brother, dog!" snarled Ellis, as he sprung upon the Miami, and with a fierce stroke buried a long knife to its very hilt in the broad chest of the savage.

The stroke was a true one, and well judged. Only a smothered groan escaped from the lips of the fated red-skin, and his tall form swayed to and fro; then as the deadly knife was withdrawn from the gaping wound, he fell backward a corpse.

There was a deadly glitter in the stern blue eyes of the young borderer, as he spurned the body aside with his foot. Never before had human blood shed in anger stained his hands, but at the thought of his kind friend lying yonder, dead and mangled he banished all trace of the remorse he might otherwise have felt.

Then wiping his weapon, Hardin donned his outer garments as he strode along, keenly watching for the place where he had left his friends. In a few moments he gained this, and then uttered a low cry as he rushed toward the spot where he had cautioned them to surely remain.

Suddenly he paused. There was the spot—but it was vacant. *The women were gone!*

For a moment the young man stood motionless, as if turned to stone. His heart throbbed wildly, and the blood rushed hotly to his head, until it seemed as though his brain would burst.

Then he raised his voice and called aloud. He uttered the name of his loved one; then that of her mother. But the only answer was the echoes of his own voice. Again and again he called, each time louder than before, but with the same result.

A groan of bitter agony burst from his lips. He could doubt the dread truth no longer; they were gone—gone!

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE NEST.

MEANWHILE let us go back and trace up the fortunes of the two women, Mrs. Holmes and her daughter, Minnie.

Clasped tightly in each other's arms, they crouched down in the covert shown them by Hardin Ellis. Thus, scarcely daring to breathe,

they awaited his return, hoping even against hope that he would bring with him the missing settler.

Then they were startled by the report of rifles, followed by shrill, exultant yells, that there could be no mistaking; they could only proceed from the throats of savages. As though death-stricken, the two women remained motionless and silent, even stilling their breath.

As if to confirm their worst fears, there came another yell—uttered by Wazecotah as he overpowered Ellis—and then others, all exultant, triumphant. They could doubt the truth no longer; they were deprived of their last earthly protector.

"My God!" gasped Minnie, in husky tones, her wildly throbbing heart almost checking utterance; "he, too—he, too!"

"I fear so!" murmured the mother, scarcely more composed; "but what shall we do?"

"He bade us stay here until he came. We would only lose ourselves in the wilderness if we attempted to better ourselves, and run still greater danger. We will stay here until—" and then, bravely as she began, her voice faltered and choked.

"But he will not come now—they have—"

"No—not they have not hurt him. He has escaped—I know it! I should die if I did not believe this. We will wait here until he does come," gasped Minnie, one hand pressing firmly upon her bosom as if to quell the raging of her heart.

Half-stupefied by the double blow, Mrs. Holmes sunk back and covered her head with her apron. Minnie rose to her knees and then gazed wildly out in the direction from whence had proceeded the boding sounds, eagerly hearkening for the returning footsteps of her lover.

Suddenly she uttered an exclamation. *She heard the sound of a footfall*, apparently coming directly from the deserted cabin.

"Mother—mother, he is coming! I know his footsteps!" gasped the maiden, springing to her feet, her beautiful face radiant with new-born joy.

The footfall neared, and all was silent. Why did not Hardin come to her? Could he have forgotten the exact spot? Minnie believed so, and she raised her voice, crying aloud:

"Hardin—father, here we are! Thank God! you have come at last!"

There was an answer, or what sounded like a human voice, although she could not distinguish the words, and Minnie replied:

"We will come—wait for us. Mother, mother, here is Hardin and father come back. Hurry—we must lose no time. There is danger yet!"

These words aroused the woman from her stupor, and arising, they both hastened to the point from whence had sounded the voices. Alas! they were doomed to a bitter disappointment; their awakening was soul-sickening!

As they distinguished the shadowy outlines of two figures standing in the path, the women rushed forward and flung their arms around them. A cry of wondering surprise greeted them, instead of joy.

Then a wild shriek broke from Minnie's lips, as she felt a hot kiss imprinted upon them. A

rough, bearded lip scratched her face. It could not be Hardin—his face was smooth shorn—then whose was it?

"Prime luck, Hackney," chuckled a voice that we have heard before. "Mine's as young and tender as a spring squirrel! How's yours?"

"Tough an' scrawny as a ten y'ar old 'possum! Cuss my toe-nails! Cap'n Al, you al'ays git the best o' the barg'in!" grunted another old-time acquaintance.

"Who are you?" faltered Minnie, as she strove to free herself from the strong arms that clasped her so tightly.

"Your slave, I judge, my precious; I shall be if you are as pretty as your lips are sweet and juicy. Love at first sight, I should say, by the way you hugged me," and the ruffian chuckled coarsely.

"We thought you were friends—my father and brother. They went back to the cabin, but I fear they have fallen into the power of the Indians. Oh! sir, please help them—won't you?"

"So-ho! You are old Holmes's women-folks, then? I've heard of you, and should have called long ago, had I not been so busy. And they were fools enough to get into trouble with the red-skins, eh?"

"Look hyar, Cap," grunted Hackney, in a dissatisfied tone. "Ef you're goin' ter gass thar all night, jest say so, 'nd I'll strike fer the den. 'Tain't safe hyar, it ain't. Jest lis'en to them thar cussed red-skins a-gawpin'! We'd best dig out o' hyar, I'm thinkin'."

"You're right, Hard; but we must take our friends along. The reds would make short work of them unless. If they make any fuss, we'll just clap something over their mouths. My hair feels mighty loose, just about here, now. Those imps mean mischief, and when they hear how we served their kindred to-day, they'll probably make the nest a visit. If they do, I'd rather be in than out. But lead the way—I'll follow."

As he spoke, Albert Carpenter—for it was indeed he—adroitly fastened his handkerchief over the mouth of the half-fainting maiden, and then when the elder woman was secured in the same manner, the two ruffians took up their way through the woods, leaving the path behind them, proceeding with the air of men thoroughly acquainted with their whereabouts.

For a year or more, previous to the opening of our tale, Carpenter had been the leader of a regular organized band of horse-thieves and land-pirates, although outwardly he was an honest man; a sort of amateur hunter and gentleman of leisure, who seemed to possess a deep pocket, well lined. It was whispered about—just how it first originated he could probably have told, had he felt so inclined—that he was an English nobleman, who had come to America upon a pleasure trip.

But soon after the tragedy beside the river—detailed in our first chapter—Carpenter learned that the truth was suspected, if not positively known, and knew that his would be but a short shrift, was he once captured by the aroused settlers. So he and his band had emigrated further west and south, settling where we now find them.

This league had grown stronger and more daring with passing years, until it became a perfect scourge to the surrounding country. But they, too, were visited by a scourge—one, too, greatly to be dreaded, for which they had ample cause.

It assumed the shape of Mink Coat, whose sharp-shooting soon gained him the *nom de guerre* of the Death Shot. This strange being hovered around them night and day, picking off man after man, seeming to avoid the numerous traps and ambuscades set for him, as by instinct.

When his rifle spoke, it sounded the death-knell of its target. The outlaw never lived to tell of his adventure.

As yet Carpenter had never met Mink Coat, face to face. He knew nothing regarding him, save what the conjectures of his own men told. They said that it must be one whom the league had fearfully wronged—the majority said *killed*, they believing it to be nothing more substantial than a ghost—at some time in the past; and some of them were right.

Carpenter and Hackney had been with those of the band who had set off after the surviving savages who had attempted to slay the mother and child. Becoming separated from their comrades they were on their way back to the "nest," when the incident occurred that threw the two women into their power.

For two hours the outlaws strode on, half-dragging their captives with them, when the bank of a wide but shallow creek was reached. Entering this, their trail was speedily lost upon the hard sandy bottom.

For a couple of miles this was followed down, and then raising the women in their arms, the abductors left the water along the barkless trunk of a fallen tree, stepping from its butt upon a ledge of rock that extended for some distance into the wood. A range of hills now loomed up before them, quite near.

Reaching the base of these, Carpenter entered a sort of narrow defile that seemed to cut the hill in twain. At its mouth he was challenged by a sentinel concealed in the bushes, and warning him to keep a close lookout, they passed on, soon pausing beside a stout log structure, built like a block-house. This was the nest of the outlaw league.

The two women were conducted through one room, and then into another, apparently extending some distance into the hillside. This room was dimly lighted and already occupied by two persons; a woman and a child—the same whose voices had so excited the old hunter, Joe Brady.

The mother glanced up affrightedly as Carpenter entered, and then her eyes drooping, she shrunk back. The outlaw chief addressed her, speaking in a rough, harsh voice:

"Lou, here are some visitors. See what they need, but mind you don't talk too much. I shall be where I can overhear every word, and if you—Understand?"

"Yes, I understand," murmured the woman, in a low, sad tone, singularly musical.

"All right, then. You can tell them what to expect if they make any disturbance. Tell them how pleasant it is here—you are a living witness of that fact—and what an agreeable time they

may expect, if they have sense enough to deserve it."

Then with a fiendish laugh Carpenter turned away, after removing the bandage from Minnie's mouth. The massive door closed with a sudden clang; then all was still.

CHAPTER VII.

A PERILOUS SITUATION.

It was a bitter blow, and Hardin Ellis nearly gave way beneath it. His system had already been severely strained, and this blow fell very heavily.

He staggered back with a groan, and but for the friendly support of a tree-trunk, would have fallen to the ground. But only for a moment did this prostration last.

He made a desperate effort and cast off the incubus, knowing that upon him now depended the future of the two women. He was now their sole earthly friend, and whatever was done for their good must be done quickly.

But what could he do? Hardin asked himself this in despair. It was very dark here in the forest depths, and a heavy foot would leave no trace for the unassisted eye.

Only by torchlight could he hope to learn aught, and that was now out of the question. Such an act would assuredly betray him into the hands of the savages, when not all the skill and cunning of Wazecotah could effect his escape again. Upon his knees Hardin sought for some clew to the mysterious disappearance, but in vain. Eyesight was of no avail; to the sense of feeling the ground was all alike.

Then, although he knew the folly of such a course, Ellis proceeded to light a torch, intending to learn, if possible, who the abductors were, and the general direction taken by them with their captives. By doing so he risked death, and endangered all hopes of aiding the two women; but that could not be avoided, unless he was content to await daylight.

With his flint and steel Hardin soon had a small, dry knot flickering faintly, and then bending low down to the ground, he sought eagerly for the desired knowledge. But for some time in vain. He could distinguish nothing save his own footprints and those of the two women.

He followed the latter to the path, and there lost the clew, in two small spots, where the ground was disturbed as if by a struggle. Upon the hard ground of the path the feeble light of the torch was not sufficient to guide him; the footsteps of the outlaws were invisible.

Hardin cast aside his torch, convinced that he could do nothing until daylight should come to assist him. Though very hard, he knew he must wait until then before proceeding further; and meanwhile, what would be the fate of his lost friends? Where were they, and in whose power?

With a groan of agony, Ellis sprung to his feet and rushed madly away through the forest. He could not remain still while they might be suffering worse than death. Though hopeless of accomplishing anything, he must keep in motion.

His brain throbbed madly, and it seemed as though he would suffocate. His veins appeared filled with molten lead, instead of blood. With a low cry he tore off his hunting-shirt and flung his hat aside, baring his feverish brow to the cool breeze.

The startling events of the night had wrought a great change in him. His mind, so terribly tried, appeared to give way, and the young settler strode through the forest, unheeding whither he went, not knowing even that he was in motion. His brain seemed on fire. He was, for the time being, insane.

For full an hour Hardin Ellis maintained this killing pace, his limbs unconscious of fatigue. He had left the log cabin far behind him, and was rapidly nearing the Indian village, although he knew it not.

He was now garbed as he had been when Wazecotah pronounced him a Miami warrior. It was as though the original Petalesha had returned to life again.

A keen and watchful ear heard the careless footfalls of the young settler, as he neared the outskirts of the village, and one of the sentinels stole stealthily forward to investigate the unusual sounds. A dread surprise awaited him.

As Hardin approached, the savage gained a fair view of his features while crossing a moon-lighted spot. A life-long friend of Petalesha's he knew every streak and line of the dead brave's war-paint; and now, despite the fact that he had stood beside the chief as he fell dead, he beheld his comrade before him, wearing the look of life!

Trembling in every limb, the savage allowed his half-leveled rifle to sink to the ground. He shrunk fearfully back as the silent figure brushed slowly past him, so close that an extended arm could have connected the two.

Probably had not the Indian been so bewildered at the sight of his dead friend's war-paint, he would have detected the difference in feature; but as it was, he did not, and when Hardin had vanished from view, the red-skin sunk to the ground, dazed and completely bewildered.

Ellis strode mechanically onward and entered the clearing where stood the Indian village; that of Wanou, the great Miami chieftain. It was brilliantly lighted up, as though for some festivity, although there was but little noise or bustle.

Numerous forms could be seen, but they were mostly those of women and children; what few men there were besides the few guards being too old and feeble to take the war-path.

With a rigid look upon his face—a stony glare in his eyes—Hardin Ellis strode toward the center of the village. He saw nothing—heard nothing of what was going on around him.

Upon his broad breast was the totem of the Miami—beside it was the Red Crow that gave Petalesha his name. A white grinning death's-head upon its brow; all symbols—every line had been faithfully reproduced by the cunning hand of Wazecotah.

At first the savor slowly approached curiosity. Then and what

the unconscious settler walked on into the full glow cast around by the huge bonfires this feeling changed to one of stupefied horror.

One and all recognized—as they thought—the person of their famed warrior, the lamented Petalesha, the Red Crow. Of him who was dead; what had been forgotten that he should return to them as if in life?

Then a wild cry arose from the assembly, as they noted the stern frown that contracted his brow. Fearing the anger of a dead man they turned and fled in horror; all but one.

The stupefied brain of Ellis awoke at this loud-sounding cry. He paused and glared around him in wondering surprise. Where was he—how came he there?

As he glanced around, Hardin caught a glimpse of his tawny-bewed arms. Then it all came to his mind like a flash of light. He comprehended the truth; the more readily that this was not the first time he had been in that sort of trance-like state.

His quick wit told him that he was in great danger of his life. True, the savages had fled in momentary dismay, but this would not last long; and then returning there surely would be some among them all who would penetrate his disguise.

He did not know that nearly all the able-bodied warriors had left the town. Even if he had, it would not have made much difference. Those who remained—women, half-grown boys and old men as they were—could easily overpower him by mere weight of numbers, when once they detected the imposition.

A single slight figure, remaining while all others had fled, attracted his attention. It was slowly crawling toward him, half-prostrated. A second look showed him it was a woman, her face painted black and her hair cropped short.

Her dress, ragged and evidently cut from intention, told him the truth. He remembered the words of Wazecotah, spoken at the cabin:

"You could deceive even Onekato, his favorite squaw!"

It came to him now like an inspiration; this woman was Onekato. She alone of them all dared to approach the supposed dead man. Who else could it be?

More than ever Ellis realized his danger. Could he deceive her eyes, sharpened by love? Would not she at once penetrate his disguise and expose the impostor who had stolen her husband's name and dress?

In the center of the village—a good quarter of a mile to the nearest point of woods—should the alarm be given, what show had he of escaping? Absolutely none. And as the woman still drew nearer, Hardin raised one hand to his brow, as if in pain. But it was to obstruct a fair view of his features. Then the woman spoke, her voice low and soft, but showing no signs of fear.

"The Great Spirit has heard the prayers of Onekato. He has sent her husband back to her that she might bid him good-by. Can Petalesha speak? If so, let him say he is glad to see his squaw—the mother of his dead child."

Ellis dared not risk a reply, for fear his tones should betray what he desired to conceal. So, catching at the idea conveyed by her words, he simply bowed his head as if in sorrow.

"Will the chief come to his lodge? Onekato has kept it ready for him. She knew he would come back to her. The Great spirit spoke to her in sleep and bade her be ready to meet her dead brave. Come!"

Hardin slowly followed the woman, who led the way through the thickly clustering lodges, now entirely deserted, save by an occasional wolfish cur-dog. From a safe distance the affrighted savages were closely observing their actions.

The young settler was sorely perplexed. He felt that discovery must come soon, and how to avoid it he could not divine. Once under the full glow of the lighted lodge—as he could see through the open door—the imposition must be detected.

Onekato respectfully stood aside to allow him to enter first. Not knowing what else to do, Hardin entered, followed by the woman, who closed the door-flap behind her.

Just then an incident occurred, so unexpected that Ellis could not guard against it. With a low, grating snarl, a hungry-looking dog rushed out from behind a pile of skins, and making a vicious snap, buried its long, keen teeth in the calf of the counterfeit Indian's leg.

The sudden onset and acute pain caused Ellis to forget the peculiar part he was playing, and, turning with an angry cry, he dealt the dog a furious kick that hurled him to the further side of the lodge, howling in agony. At the same time a low cry broke from the lips of Onekato.

It told Hardin that he was detected, and he knew there was no time to be lost. He turned quickly toward the woman, muttering in a threatening tone:

"Don't speak—cry out, and I will kill you!"

Although in his excitement he spoke in English, there could be no mistaking his meaning. But still the woman did not obey. Frightened at the sudden discovery, she uttered another cry, loud and shrill.

It was no time to be fastidious. It was either her or him, and the settler did not hesitate for a moment. Then his strong hands clutched her throat, effectually checking all further outcry.

Still, though so greatly excited, he did not forget that she was a woman, and raising her from the floor he carried her to the pallet, still stifling her cries. A simple plan had resolved itself in his mind.

With skill quickened by the impending danger, Ellis speedily tore pieces from her dress, and bound her arms behind her back. Half-dead with terror, and not yet recovered from the severe choking he had administered, Onekato was silent.

Then he hastily fastened a rag between her jaws, also securing her feet. He could hear shrill cries without the lodge, and knew that the alarm had been given. Only a bold daring could avail him aught now, and that course he resolved to follow.

The confused trampling of feet sounded nearer, and Hardin knew that the Indians were gathering courage from concert. Should they attempt an entrance, all would be lost.

Glancing hurriedly around him, Hardin caught sight of the very thing he needed, a large panther-skin robe, gayly bedizened with beads

and stained quills. Catching this up, he flung it over his shoulders, so that one corner partially concealed his face.

Then he boldly flung aside the hanging skin that served for a door, and emerged, dropping it behind him again. A quick glance took in the situation, and truly, it was one well calculated to try the stoutest heart.

Nearly one hundred savages, men, women and children, were advancing in a compact body, all brandishing some weapon, uttering shrill cries and shouts as though to keep up their courage. At the appearance of the counterfeit Petalesha, they all paused, as if by common consent.

For a moment Hardin Ellis hesitated. There were two routes to choose from; one directly through the wood—the other in the opposite direction. Of the two he chose the boldest course.

His disguise had proved good, and aided by the robe, he felt he could pass them undetected. Besides, did he take the other, it would be but natural for the Indians to follow him, and then passing directly in front of Petalesha's lodge, some of the number might be tempted to enter, to learn from Onekato the cause of her alarm.

So drawing himself up to his full height, one hand clutching his rifle, the other holding the ends of his robe, Ellis slowly stalked toward the crowd, his eyes wearing a fixed stare. Despite his peril, it was only with the greatest difficulty that the young settler could maintain the rigidity of his facial muscles, as he beheld the red-skins separate, and fall back upon either side, in ludicrous haste.

Slowly and deliberately, looking neither to the right nor the left, Hardin stalked along the lines of awe-struck savages, and then passing the last one, he kept on toward the forest. Although itching with the desire to flee at the top of his speed, he kept himself down to the same deliberate step until he had nearly reached the edge of the timber.

Then his heart gave one wild leap. From behind him he heard a shrill cry, and then beheld the form of Onekato rush from her lodge, screaming wildly some words that he could not distinguish.

The loud, angry yells that uprose from the savages, told Ellis that his audacious ruse was known, and then without waiting for more, he sprang into the forest, dropping the robe that had stood him in such good stead.

Pausing for a moment to hearken, Hardin distinguished the quick, heavy tramp of the red-skins, as they dashed after him in hot pursuit. Trusting to the darkness to cover his move, Hardin turned abruptly to the right, and gliding rapidly yet noiselessly along, skirting the enemy, hoping thus to throw them off his track at least long enough for him to gain a safe distance.

When nearly half-way around the village, Hardin struck off into the woods, running at full speed, feeling assured that he was beyond hearing of his foes. For nearly two miles he maintained this rate of speed, and then feeling comparatively safe, he slackened his pace

the better to study out his location and to regain breath.

But his troubles were not yet over. He was doomed to encounter a still greater peril than any preceding one of that eventful night.

As he passed beneath the overhanging limbs of a huge tree, Hardin walked slowly, his mind dwelling upon the mysterious disappearance of Minnie and her mother. Suddenly he heard a wild yell, and ere he could glance up, a heavy body dropped from the tree, striking full upon his shoulders, felling him to the ground, almost smothering him with the soft dirt and decayed leaves.

Then, with a clinging form upon his back, Hardin felt a strong hand clutch his hair and forcibly draw back his head. He beheld a bright knife glittering over his exposed throat—he beheld a pair of wild, glaring eyes staring him full in the face—a low, grating snarl, fierce and unearthly, sounded in his ears!

With a low cry, Ellis threw up one hand to avert the descending weapon.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOUISA.

THE heavy door closed with a sudden clang behind the forms of the two outlaws, Captain Carpenter and Hard Hackney. Minnie and her mother were left alone with the woman he had called Louisa and her child.

For some minutes neither spoke, but stood gazing at each other; but then Minnie went to her mother's side, just in time to catch her fainting form in her arms. The trials of the night had been too much for her to bear, and she felt that she should die.

"Let me help," cried Louisa, springing forward. "You look ill, too. Help me to lay her upon the lounge yonder. There; hold her head, while I get some water. Do not worry. It will be over in a minute. She has only fainted."

"My God!" moaned the poor girl in agony; "she is dead! First father, then Hardin, now mother. Oh, I shall go mad!"

"No, it is not so bad as that. Don't give way to despair altogether. Be brave, and all will come around right yet," cheerily replied Louisa, the sudden emergency having aroused her from her usual condition of apathetic despair.

Already she looked like another person. The vacant expression had vanished from her face—the dazed look from her eyes; a bright flush suffused her cheek, and rendered her fairly beautiful.

That she had been once, not very far in the past, an unusually beautiful woman, none who saw her now could have doubted. Her tall, elegant figure, although somewhat wasted and less full, was still graceful and pleasing; her hair, long and unconfined, was still purely black and luxuriant. Her complexion was somewhat pallid and wan, but was still clear and smooth. All in all, she was not such a one as might have been looked for in a place like that.

Her prediction was fulfilled, for Mrs. Holmes finally opened her eyes, fully conscious, though very weak. With a feeble sigh she sunk back,

totally worn out in body and mind, and fell into a heavy slumber.

Minnie was too ill at ease to think of sleeping; she was reflecting upon the probable fate of her father and lover. And then, as she recalled the sinister words of Al Carpenter, she shudderingly glanced around the room, her eyes finally resting upon the wishful face of Louisa, who sat closely regarding her.

"Where am I—what is this place?" asked Minnie slowly, dreading to hear the reply, lest her worst fears should be confirmed.

"Don't you know? Don't you know that man? The one who brought you here, I mean," faltered Louisa.

"No. He found us in the woods, where we had fled from the Indians."

And then Minnie briefly detailed the events of the night.

"Better for you if you had fallen into *their* hands, rather than *his*," bitterly muttered Louisa. "They would have slain you outright—he will kill you, body and soul! He is a devil—a cruel, black-hearted fiend!"

"Why do you stay here then? If you hate him so deeply, why don't you flee to your home—your friends?"

"You see him?" pointing to the now peacefully sleeping boy. "That is my reason. I have been guarded night and day, or if I was not, they would take him away from me, so that I could not get him. They knew that he was all I had left upon earth to love—I could not abandon him."

"Then *he*—he is not—your—?" faltered Minnie, ceasing abruptly, as the brow of the woman flushed hotly.

"My husband, you would say. No, he is not my husband, although—God pity me!—he is that boy's father! Wait—do not interrupt me. Hear me out before you condemn me. I will tell you all that I know; it is not much, although my mind is clearer to-night than it has been for a long—long time. It seems as though the sight of your pure face has done me good. But listen—it is not long."

"Nearly three years ago—as near as I can recollect, for all is very dim and indistinct to me as I look back—I first saw this man Carpenter. He told me that he loved me, and asked me to be his wife; but I laughed at him. I loved another, and I told him so. I can remember that much—then there comes a long, dreary blank."

"I next remember being here with that child—then only a few days old—in my arms. I could not understand it at first. It seemed like a dream. But then he came and told me all. He swore he did not know that I was insane. He said that I spoke and acted perfectly natural. He said that it was my child—and *his*! I was like one stupefied. I could not move or speak. I thought I was paralyzed."

"But gradually I recovered. The babe grew stronger, and began to win upon my heart. I had no one else to love; I poured it all upon him. Since then I have lived on, hoping and watching for a chance to escape—to return to my friends. I do not know where we are. I have never been allowed to go half a mile from

this place, and there is always some one watching me."

Minnie gazed at the woman pityingly. It was a sad tale she had listened to. Her heart went out to the poor being so foully wronged.

Louisa arose and walked around the room, as if idly. But there was a deep purpose concealed beneath that listless demeanor. As she returned to near the maiden, her eyes shone brilliantly, and there was an eager look upon her face that inspired hope in Minnie's heart, she scarcely knew why.

"Listen, but do not move or speak," muttered the woman, as she stood beside Minnie, her eyes fixed upon the wall, her lips not moving as she spoke. "I was afraid he was listening to my words. But he is not—although he may creep up at any moment. *Do you wish to escape from here?*"

"Yes, oh! yes!" murmured Minnie, her entire form trembling with revived hope.

"Hush! Be cautious, or you may ruin all!" warned Louisa. "I can save you, I think, and free us all from that demon's power. Are you strong—can you endure great fatigue? Can you walk a dozen—twenty miles?"

"Yes—anything; just so we can leave this place. I must find help to search for father—for Hardin. To rescue them if alive—to avenge them if dead!"

"Good! then listen. There are over twenty men in this building—or around it. They think we cannot escape them. But we can. I had my suspicions aroused by Carpenter's always leaving a guard with me while in this room. In the other—one like this—he would leave me alone, only barring the door. So one night while here I pretended sleep, and I saw one of these boards—there near the fire-place—lifted up and a man enter. I knew then that there was a passage leading to the outer air somewhere, for I had been watching for hours, and he could not have passed through the room without my knowing it."

"Now we will fasten the door; bar it and push the furniture up against it—and then flee by this passage. We may be followed and brought back, but it is worth a risk. We may escape—and for that chance I would risk my life. And so will you, if you reflect what fate awaits you here."

"I will—we will do just as you bid us. Let us start—every moment is worth a life to me now. I—oh! my father—my poor father!" murmured Minnie, her voice choked with hysterical sobs.

"Hark!" cried Louisa, turning quickly.

From the outer room sounded the echoes of a confused tumult; from beyond—evidently in the open air—came the sound of rifle-shots, mingled with yells, wild and diabolical. The truth was self-evident—the nest was attacked by savages!

The door was flung hastily open, and Carpenter entered. His face was flushed and his voice trembled with excitement as he spoke.

"Don't be frightened—we are attacked by the cursed red-skins; but they are only a few and we will easily beat them off. So just remain quiet and don't fret. It will all be right

soon. I just come in to set your fears at rest."
 "You need your fears allayed more than we do, Albert Carpenter," boldly replied Louisa, her voice ringing as of old. "You tremble like a leaf. Do you come here to gain courage from women?"

"Take care, my girl," angrily replied Carpenter, his eyes flashing venomously. "Don't you push me too far. I have an account to settle with you, anyhow, as soon as this muss is over. I heard all the lies you told Miss Holmes yonder, until I was called off as the red-skins came in sight. I will make you eat them yet. You know they were idle lies."

"I know they were the truth," boldly replied Louisa, her face regaining its color, banished by the words of Carpenter regarding his eaves-dropping. "You can do no more than you have done."

"Can't I, indeed? You forget how I stood between you and the men last week. A word will set them going again. Then you will be glad enough to cling to me and beg my protection. Beware how you let your tongue run. Best bridle it—it will be your ruin yet," brutally said the outlaw chieftain.

Louisa sunk back in a chair, faint and trembling. The horrible threat had crushed her spirit. With a fiendish chuckle Carpenter turned and left the room, as a voice was heard calling his name.

"Does he know—did he hear you, do you think?" gasped Minnie, trembling lest their new-born hope should be crushed.

"No—not at all. If he had he would have made us go to the other room. We are saved now. They will be kept busy beating the Indians off, and won't give us a thought until it is over. Rouse your mother now—we must be at work. Every moment gained now is another chance for freedom."

Mrs. Holmes was quietly aroused and told the plan. She received it in silence, a wan smile playing around her parched lips. Her mind had not yet recovered from the blow that had fallen so heavily.

Minnie wept at the sight, but could not pause to awaken the sleeping senses now. Time was too precious.

The heavy oaken table was cautiously moved against the door, and then the lounge placed upon it. The other furniture was then added to the barricade, which at best could delay the opening of the door for but a few minutes. Still, it seemed a protection, and made the women feel safer.

Thus trembling with conflicting fear and hope, Louisa opened the cunningly-concealed trap-door, and glanced down. A narrow passage was revealed, apparently leading directly into the bowels of the hill.

It smelled damp and noisome, but the women did not hesitate. Taking the still slumbering child, Louisa led the way, closely followed by Minnie, who held her mother's hand. Then the trap-door was lowered behind them, and they were enveloped in most intense gloom.

With an involuntary shudder, Louisa led the way along the narrow passage, forced to creep on her hands and knees.

CHAPTER IX.

WORKING IN CONCERT.

HARDIN ELLIS flung up one hand to ward off the descending blow. Love of life lent him strength, and as his assailant's wrist fell into his hand, its downward progress was checked.

Taken at such a fearful disadvantage, however, the young settler could have withstood his antagonist for but a few moments, at best. The heavy pressure upon his back—the strong hand drawing his head backward—the twisting of the hand he had caught, united, proved too much.

But the young borderer's end had not yet come. As he gained a fair view of his foe's face, a glad cry broke from his lips. He felt that the peril was over.

"Brady—Joe Brady, man, don't you know me? Would you kill a friend?" he gasped, as the knife-hand was wrested from his clutch.

The old hunter—for it was indeed he—started in wonder. But he did not speak, and the weapon hung suspended above the young man's throat.

"My God! man, would you murder me? I'm a white man—as much so as you are. Don't you remember Hardin Ellis? You stopped at our cabin for near a week."

"I know the voice," slowly muttered the half-crazed hunter, as if to himself. "But it is an Indian who speaks. The other was white."

"And so am I, if you rub the paint off. Let up, man! Your knees are as sharp as pine knots," grumbled Hardin, as Brady slowly lowered his knife.

"Let him arise, old man," muttered Mink Coat, as he also descended from the tree. "Beauty shall watch him."

"Hallo, who are *you*?" cried Ellis, in surprise, keenly eying the strange being, not noticing the wolf that eyed him suspiciously, showing its gleaming fangs threateningly.

"A friend, if you are an honest man. If you are not—then beware! I am their enemy—I and Beauty, here."

"Who is he, Brady?" asked Hardin, turning to the old hunter, who stood moodily leaning upon his long rifle.

"Mink Coat."

"The Death Shot! And this is the man?" echoed Ellis, in great surprise, as he gazed curiously upon the strange being of whom he had heard so much, who now crouched to the ground, caressing the head of the fawning wolf.

Arousing himself, Brady asked Hardin the meaning of his masquerade, and the young settler briefly detailed his adventures. In return Brady told him something of his own movements.

They—he and Mink Coat—had easily eluded the pursuit of the outlaws, whose ardor cooled quite perceptibly upon learning that one of the fugitives was none other than the Death Shot. But it was fully sunset when the two men paused for rest, at one of the secret haunts of Mink Coat.

Then sallying forth, intending to visit the vicinity of the robbers' nest, in hopes of learning definitely whether the fair singer was indeed the daughter, so long lost, of Brady, they

had heard the approach of Hardin, and swung themselves up into the tree. But seeing—as he had supposed—a solitary savage, Brady had resolved to rub him out, and making his leap, the affair ended happily, as already detailed.

"Well," said Hardin, as the old scout concluded; "I will keep you company for a part of the way, at least, as it was not far from there that I lost my friends. I can do nothing until morning anyhow, as it is."

"Good! You help me and I'll help you. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, let's go. Mink Coat, let Beauty lead the way. There is no time to lose. We must find a hiding place in the hills before daylight."

"I can lead you inside the den, if you wish it," laughed the Death Shot.

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes. Like minks, they have one hole to go in at and another one to come out of. I caught one there once, and after sending him to his master, I followed the hole to its other end. I could send them all up to the bright stars yonder, if I wished, with one little spark. But it don't seem right. They should go *down*—not *up*!" muttered Mink Coat as they strode rapidly along.

"How so? What do you mean, my friend?" cautiously queried Brady.

"They keep a half-dozen kegs of powder down there, in a hole."

"If it was not for Lou—! Mink Coat," said Brady, excitedly, laying one hand upon the other's shoulder; "promise me never to touch this off until I say you may. I believe that that woman we heard singing to-day is my child. I must save her first. Then I don't care what you do. Will you promise me?"

"Yes—I promise."

"Well, then, lead the way to this hole. We'll see what it looks like, anyhow. Mayhap 'twill come handy to us."

Then the trio—or quartette, if Beauty be not ignored—proceeded in silence toward the nest. For half an hour they kept up the long, swinging stride, their eagerness being such that fatigue was unfelt.

Then they simultaneously paused, each uttering a little exclamation, and listening with breathless attention. From before them came the sharp rattle of fire-arms—the shrill yells and hoarser shouts telling of the rival races in deadly collision.

"The red-skins have attacked the robbers' den!" muttered Mink Coat.

"Then we must hurry. If the red devils once get inside, we may be too late to do any good. They'll kill our friends, too!" cried Brady, springing forward.

As they neared the range of hills, Mink Coat veered to the left of the spot from whence still proceeded the sounds of firing, and after crossing a slight ridge, began stealthily creeping along under cover of the dense bushes until the bottom of a long and rather deep ravine was reached.

From this point, nothing could be seen of the nest. A high hill concealed it from view. And then as Mink Coat waited for his comrades to

approach, his eyes were fixed keenly upon a good sized clump of bushes growing from the opposite side of the ravine.

These he indicated as being where the mouth of the subterranean passage was concealed. Brady urged an immediate entrance, but Mink Coat demurred, saying it would be best to take a little scout around, to learn how matters were working at the nest, before venturing inside.

"I will go," said Hardin; "I am pretty fair in their lingo, and wear the dress of a Miami. It will be safer for me than either of you."

"Hist!" muttered Mink Coat, as Beauty uttered a faint snarl. "There are some persons coming up the ravine now!"

In a few moments the fact was placed beyond a doubt, even to the less practiced ear of Ellis. He could hear the shuffling footsteps upon the rocky shale, and then could distinguish several forms, dusky and evil-looking in their war-paint and plumes. They numbered over a dozen, all told.

It was quite evident that they little suspected the presence of a foe, so near at hand, for they were eagerly discussing the details of some plan, and were too deeply interested in it, to give much attention to the surrounding objects. From what little Hardin could glean, they intended scaling the hill back of the nest, and learn if it would not be possible to roll down heavy rocks upon the roof, while their comrades kept the besieged busy in front.

They glided past the covert of the three men, unsuspecting their presence, and Hardin gave a slight start as he recognized among them the stately form of Wazecotah, his friend. Then just as they had rounded the turn, though still in sight, Hardin saw the chief stop and stoop down to fasten his moccasin.

With a gesture to his comrades to remain quiet, the daring settler arose and glided toward the Miami, keeping in the shadows. Then as Wazecotah stood erect, Ellis uttered a slight chirp. It was a signal frequently used by them upon their still-hunts; and the chief glanced keenly around him.

Ellis attracted his attention by a gesture, and then sunk back into the shadow. Wazecotah muttered a few words to the nearest savage,

As he stood before the disguised settler his face was calm and immobile; but there was an unusual glitter in his dark eye that told he was ill at ease. In a low tone he spoke:

"Why is my brother here, and alone?"

Ellis quickly made known the misfortune that had befallen their friends. The chief listened in silence and seemed pondering deeply.

"Wazecotah knows where they are," he at length uttered, in a tone of conviction.

"Where—but no, how can you know?"

"Wazecotah don't know for *certain*, but he believes they are here—in this big lodge. A scout saw two men go in there with two squaws. He did not know who they were. But it must have been them. Wazecotah thought you were far away and out of danger, by now."

"If they are in there how can we get them, then?" anxiously queried Hardin,

"The Miamis will take the lodge, and if Wazecotah cannot save his friends he will die with them. But it will be hard. The red-men are very angry. The white dogs shoot straight. Much blood has been spilled out there," gloomily replied the Indian.

"Chief, can I trust you?"

"My brother!"

"Pardon me—it was foolish to ask it. I know I can. Then come with me. I can show you a trail that will take you inside the lodge. Perhaps we can find our friends without alarming the bad pale-faces. If we can, and set them free, then you can bring your braves around here and surprise the enemy."

The two friends slowly and cautiously retraced their steps toward the tunnel, Hardin going in front to prevent his friends from being alarmed at the appearance of the Indian, and to notify them of the valuable ally he had secured.

CHAPTER X.

JOY AND DESPAIR.

THROUGH the devious passage the three women slowly crept, ignorant of what might lie before them, or if instead of freedom, they were not momentarily nearer to death. They had not the slightest idea of where the tunnel's mouth was; whether in full view of the nest, or beyond the range of hills.

Then Louisa beheld a dim light, and knew by the peculiar shimmer that it was the moonlight shining through the bushes that screened the tunnel's mouth. Renewing her caution to the others, she crept forward to reconnoiter.

Peering cautiously forth, she beheld nothing suspicious. The direction from whence the firing proceeded told her that the nest could not command a view of the spot.

In a low voice she bade Minnie advance, and then stepping through the bushes, they stood upright once more. A low cry of despair broke from Louisa's lips, as several dusky figures uprose from their covert and sprung forward toward them.

Nor were the others less alarmed. Minnie saw that the two foremost were savages. Surely they could be none other than enemies!

"Minnie—thank God! I have found you—alive and well!" cried Hardin Ellis, as still disguised as Petalesha, he sprung past Wazecotah and clasped the maiden closely in his arms.

She could no longer doubt. She knew the voice, she recognized the features, despite the hideous mask of paint, and with a low cry of most intense joy, her head sunk upon his broad breast, great tears dropping from her grateful eyes.

"Hardin Ellis," slowly uttered Mrs. Holmes, "where is Andrew—where is my husband?"

"Tell her, chief; I cannot!" muttered the young settler, a bitter pang wringing his heart.

"Hardin, you do not—you cannot mean that? He is not—not—?" faltered Minnie, her cheek blanching again.

"My darling, do not give way. Keep up for her sake," pleaded Hardin, anxiously.

"Tell me—I can—I will try to bear it."

"Minnie, I would have died to have saved him, but it was not so ordained. He was dead

before I left you. The savages killed him almost at his own doorstep."

The maiden did not reply. She could not. She lay there, supported by the strong arms of her lover, weak and trembling. It was dreadful to thus have all hope banished forever.

Wazecotah stepped forward and respectfully clasped the hands of the widow. He gazed down into her eyes, sadly, gloomily.

For a moment she returned his gaze and then her eyes drooped. A convulsive tremor agitated her entire frame; then it became firm and rigid. Her voice sounded clear and distinct as she spoke. She seemed another woman.

"That will do. You need not tell me. I know the worst now. Andrew is dead!"

Meanwhile, Joe Brady had been keenly eying Louisa, who stood a little apart still holding her sleeping boy. A sad smile played around her lips as her gaze rested upon the forms of the lovers.

Then the old hunter glided forward, a puzzled, dissatisfied look upon his face. A half-scared glow lighted up his eyes, and his features worked convulsively.

Placing one hand upon Louisa's shoulder, he gently turned her around until the moonlight fell athwart her features. She gazed at him, wonderingly.

"Who are you, lady? I thought you one very near and dear to me, whom I lost years ago. But I fear I am in error; my eyesight is failing me of late. It is her figure—her hair, eyes and voice; but the face is strange. Who are you? I pray you tell me, and do not trifle with the heart of a poor old man who has been almost driven crazy with sorrow and suffering."

"I do not know you, sir," gently replied the woman. "I fear you mistake me for some one else. Who is it you look for?"

"My daughter, Louisa. He stole her—Al Carpenter," and the old hunter fairly ground his teeth with fury, as he uttered the hated name.

"I do not know her. He used to call me Louisa, and threatened to strike me if I did not answer to the name. But I am Lottie Henderson. He stole me from my home nearly three years ago."

All conversation was now interrupted by a loud, heavy thud, that jarred the whole ground followed by shrill, exultant yells from the crest of the hill back of the robbers' nest.

The cause was plain. The plan of rolling down rocks upon the roof bade fair to prove a success.

There was great peril to the little party, so strangely brought together, in staying where they now were. At any moment another band of Miamis might come up the ravine, or else the outlaws, seeing that their stronghold must soon succumb, might bethink themselves of the tunnel and endeavor to escape by its aid.

In either case a collision could scarcely be avoided, in which the fugitives, as the weaker party, must go down. None knew this fact better than Wazecotah, and with a gesture commanding attention he spoke, using broken English, that all might understand his meaning.

"Plenty big danger here now. Bes' you all go 'way off. Miami come—bad pale face come—mek heap trouble. Ribber good—much good.

Got no scalp. Bes' go there mighty quick; git in canoe—paddle like debble. Block-house good—plenty. It got no scalp neider."

"You think it is our safest plan, chief?" asked Ellis.

"Yeh—fo' sure. Git canoe by black rock—go down ribber."

"But you—will you go with us?"

"No; mus' stay here. You git 'way off—den tell Injun man—go in hole—kill plenty bad pale-face. Got in trap, all same like musquash. Plenty scalp alive. Heap good!"

"But if they see our trail and follow it? We have women along, and they can't travel very fast."

"Wazecotah fool Injun den. Mek go 'nudder way, if kin. If won't go, den he step off—run fin' friends—help um git 'way off. Mus' kill Wazecotah 'fore hurt white brudder," earnestly added the chief.

The wisdom of his advice was perceptible to all, and then, led by Mink Coat, the party glided away up the ravine, as the safest mode of leaving the vicinity unperceived. Ellis assisted Minnie, Brady her mother, while Mink Coat carried the little boy, who had awakened, but who seemed perfectly at home with his strange nurse, nestling confidently down against the smooth soft fur of the Dead Shot's coat.

The ravine was followed up to its head, and then crossing the hill, the little party wound along through the forest, heading toward the river that now seemed their haven of safety. Their progress was necessarily very slow and tedious, as Lottie—or Louisa, as we have heretofore known her—was unaccustomed to walking, while Mrs. Holmes was still faint and weak.

Thus a priceless half-hour was lost by the latter woman's fainting, and only until a rude litter was constructed, could the flight be resumed. Brady and Hardin carried her thus, and through the tangled forest, it was any thing but an easy or expeditious mode of traveling.

The bright sun was already shining down upon the worn and jaded party when they reached the river's bank. And then in looking by the black rock as directed, to their horror, *no canoe was to be found!*

Desperate and 'alarmed for the safety of his friends, Hardin, assisted by Mink Coat and Brady, sought thoroughly in every spot where a canoe could possibly be found; but in vain. Then the Death Shot uttered a low cry as he bent his ear to the ground.

The rapid tramp of some one approaching at full speed was heard, and then a dark form sprang out into their midst.

"Don't shoot—don't shoot!" cried Hardin, knocking up the leveled rifle of Mink Coat. It's Wazecotah, our friend!"

CHAPTER XI.

WAZECOTAH'S VENGEANCE.

THE Miami chief stood silently watching the little party as they wound along the ravine, and after they had disappeared from view for some minutes, he turned and retraced his steps toward the front of the nest. A dark frown now disfigured his naturally handsome features,

and evidently he was resolved upon some desperate deed.

He sought out Wanou, the head chief, who commanded the war-party in person. That worthy now stood gazing up at the hill-crest above the log building.

A party of savages could be seen there, slowly rolling over a huge rock that could not have weighed less than a ton, heading it toward a point from whence, if set in motion down the hill, it must dash directly upon the roof. Then with a wild yell, the ponderous missile was hurled from its balance.

Slowly at first, but gaining momentum at every leap, the huge boulder dashed downward upon its work of destruction. A dense cloud of leaves and dust followed its course; then with one mighty bound, it alighted full upon the roof.

Nothing built of wood could have resisted that shock. The heavy oaken puncheons forming the roofing, crackled and broke like straws. The entire structure quaked and trembled like a house of cards beneath its builder's breath. The boulder sunk entirely from view of those without.

Loud oaths and curses, mingled with shrieks of agony, coming from the doomed nest, told that the missile had not been harmless. The crisis was at hand, and Wazecotah knew that did not he speak speedily, the remnant of their prey would still escape them by the subterranean mode of exit.

"Does the chief wish to end this now?" he said to Wanou who asked his meaning.

"Wazecotah has got eyes, and he knows how to use them," quietly replied the Indian. "He has found a hole in the ground that leads into the lodge yonder. The pale-faced cowards will be running away by it, unless we stop them."

"Where is it?"

"Tell the warriors to follow, and you shall see."

In five minutes the main body of the Miamis were dashing up the ravine, and none too soon, for already several of the outlaws had emerged from the tunnel. A quick volley disposed of all but one, and while he fled at full speed up the gully, those of his comrades who had not yet emerged cowered back in sullen despair.

Several red-skins darted off after the fugitive greatly to the disquietude of Wazecotah. It was already growing light, and might not they stumble upon the trail left by his friends? This was far from unlikely, but still he could do nothing to avert the danger.

Besides, there was another duty he must perform; a duty to the dead. He had a vow that must be fulfilled upon that night.

Pausing before the tunnel entrance, the Miamis poured into it a heavy volley of rifle and musket balls. These were echoed back by a few spiteful shots, though more than one shriek rung out through the din, telling of death agony. Then with Wanou and Wazecotah leading the way, the red-skins rushed to the assault, with shrill yells of exultant fury.

The outlaws were hemmed in by a cordon of death. From the front of the building shots were still being poured in through the loopholes and cracks made by the tumbling rocks,

Another heavy bowlder fell upon the ruined roof, while those from the ravine still poured through the tunnel.

Slowly retreating, the outlaws soon regained the building, where they could hope to make a stand more successfully than in the dark passage. But they were foiled in their attempt to close the trap-door.

Wanou and Wazecotah were close upon their heels, and hurling the slab aside, they sprung out into the room, weapons in hand, with their triumphant war-whoop ringing like a death-knell in the ears of their foes. Then, as other Miamis swarmed up the passage, a scene of fearful confusion followed.

The robbers were naturally daring, reckless men, and now, cornered beyond a hope of escape, unless by a victory over their numerous foes, they fairly outdid themselves. But it was all in vain.

Three against one was too great odds for them to battle successfully.

Hard Hackney fell beneath the tomahawk of Wanou; Gabe Burke had disappeared from the *melee*.

But while fighting furiously, Wazecotah's eyes often sought an active, well-built form standing in one corner, wielding a heavy saber with wonderful effect, seeming to bear a charmed life. Toward this point the chief was gradually forcing his way, fighting with both hands; a hatchet in one, a knife in the other.

Then with a wild yell, strange and deadly, Wazecotah sprung before the pale-face, waving aside the warrior who confronted him. With a fierce curse the outlaw leveled a furious blow at the chief's head.

The blade was adroitly avoided, partly by a nimble leap, partly by the strong-bladed knife; and then ere the white man could recover his guard, Wazecotah dealt him a crushing blow upon the head with the flat side of his tomahawk, and the outlaw fell to the floor like a log.

Wazecotah bound his hands with a stout belt, and then sat down beside him. He did not heed the strife that still raged around them, although fast dying out, the outlaws rapidly falling.

In a few moments the bound man opened his eyes and glared wonderingly around him. He strove to raise a hand to his head, but in vain. Then Wazecotah spoke, in a low, stern voice, using purely-accented English:

"Albert Carpenter, look up. Do you recognize me?"

"No—you are an Indian," muttered the outlaw chief—for it was indeed he—but a startled look overspread his gore-stained features.

"I am no Indian. I am Cliff Ward!" slowly pronounced the seeming Miami. "Now tell me what you have done with the maiden you stole from me that night—Louisa Brady?"

"You—you lie! He is dead—they killed him!" gasped Carpenter, glaring wildly at the disguised avenger.

"No, they did not—though it was not their fault—nor yours. They shot me, and flung my body into the river for dead. But I was saved by some Indians. That don't matter now, though. Tell me what you did with the girl?"

Quick! there is no time to lose. Your men are nearly all down, and I could not save your life much longer even if I would. Quick! Tell me!"

"I did not—she ran away!" gasped Carpenter, great drops of perspiration standing upon his brow.

"You lie now—tell me, or—"

To conclude the sentence, Wazecotah—or Cliff Ward, as he declared himself to be—raised his keen scalping-knife, and gathering up the long hair of the outlaw, pressed the cold steel against his skin, until the hot blood trickled from beneath it.

"Mercy—mercy, for the love of God!" shrieked Carpenter, striving to free himself from the vise-like grip, his eyes almost bursting from their sockets with excess of terror.

"You deserve none—you shall have none—mercy is not for such as you. Tell me the truth of what I ask or I will scalp you alive and then roast you over a slow fire!" sternly spoke the avenger.

"I will—I will! Only have mercy—spare my life! I am not fit to die!" gasped the robber.

"Speak quick! Where is Louisa Brady?"

"Dead! She died—I did not kill her. We had a few words—I wanted her to be mine—she refused and struck me in the face. It maddened me. I was a devil then—not myself. I struck her on the head, but only with my hand—I did not know it was clinched until all was over. I did not think it would hurt her—but it did. She fell at my feet—dead! It nearly killed me then, for God knows I loved her better than I did my own life! Her scornful me drove me to the bad more than anything else."

As he spoke, Carpenter seemed more subdued and calmer than before. The dread past seemed to come up before him and rob his present peril of its terrors.

With a cold, stern face, Wazecotah listened to his words. His keen eye saw that the murderer was telling the truth. There was no deceit in the man's tones or his face.

Then a steely glitter filled the avenger's eyes. His form seemed to dilate and grow fuller, as he spoke again:

"Albert Carpenter, you have done murder. You killed the girl I loved better than life. You tried to murder me, and failed through no fault of yours. You have wrecked my life forever, and made me an outcast. As you have sinned, so must you atone. If you wish to pray, do so now. When I count twenty it will be too late. At the last word you die!"

"Mercy—mercy! I can not die will not die—I!" shrieked Carpenter, wildly. "Spare my life—only let me live and I will do any thing for you! I will be your slave—your dog—any thing, just so I may live to repent of my misdeeds!"

"No; it is too late now. You should have thought of that before. Your doom is sealed," and then in a low, distinct tone the avenger began to count

Carpenter glared wildly at his executioner and strove to speak—to plead for life; but in vain. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, and the words refused to issue. Slowly the numerals were enunciated.

Then came the fatal word—*twenty!* Drowning its utterance came a dull, heavy *thud*, as the bright steel blade hissed through the air and was buried deep into the brain of the doomed wretch.

One faint tremor—and then all was over. The wretched outlaw would sin no more. He was dead.

Wazecotah—as we will still call him—arose erect with a long-drawn breath. He felt no remorse for his dread act of vengeance. He had been by far too deeply wronged for that. But still he did not experience the delirious joy he had anticipated.

At that moment a Miami brave hastily entered the room, through the tunnel, and told Wanou of a discovery. He had been one of those who had followed the fleeing outlaw up the ravine.

After the death of this man, as they were returning the Indians had stumbled upon a broad trail that they easily recognized as being made by white men and women, who had evidently fled from the nest. While the other two braves had begun tracing it up, he had returned to impart the tidings.

Wanou instantly ordered a number of braves to follow him, bidding Wazecotah remain to collect the plunder gained by the victory, and after removing it, to fire the building. Then leading his men, he entered the tunnel and followed the guide, bent upon adding the fugitive party to the list of his victims.

Wazecotah remembered his pledge, and resolved to foil the chief, if to do so lay in his power; if not, then he would die in defense of his friends. First bidding the Indians pillage the house, he left the place, and entering the woods, took a roundabout course in order to head off the Miamis, and dashed through the forest at breakneck speed, soon heading directly for the black rock, where he expected to find some trace of the fugitives, indicating their departure for the block-house.

He knew that he would gain at least a couple of miles upon his late comrades, as they must necessarily proceed at a slow rate in following up the trail. This he trusted would be sufficient start to enable him to guide them safely to the block-house below.

We have already seen how utterly he was disappointed when he found the party still at the black rock. He feared then that all was lost.

"Why are you here?" he gasped, speaking in English, but owing to their excitement, no one noticed the difference in accent with the language he usually used.

"The boat is gone!" gloomily replied Ellis. "We can not find any signs of it."

"Then there is no time to lose. We must take down the river on land. We can not stop to build a raft. In half an hour Wanou will be here with his braves. They are following your trail now. Come—quick—follow me!" hastily ordered Wazecotah, as he stepped into the water, shallow at this point.

He was promptly obeyed, and the little party, forgetting their exhaustion in this extremity of peril, dashed at fair speed down the river. For nearly half a mile they proceeded thus, when the formation of the bank forced them once more to the woods.

"Listen," said Wazecotah, speaking hurriedly as they pressed on; "we must be overtaken before the block can be gained, with these women. They are nearly exhausted now. Our only chance now is in obtaining help from the block-house. They are not attacked, and can spare enough men to save us. A dozen will do if you cannot get more. Wanou has only about twenty braves with him. Who will hurry on ahead and bring them up to our assistance?"

Three volunteered; Mink Coat, Brady and Hardin Ellis. Of them Wazecotah singled the old hunter.

"You know the place?"

"Like a book."

"Good! then you must hasten and bring help. Our lives all depend upon you. We will make a fight of it, and hold out until you come, if possible. But remember a minute lost may be fatal. You understand?"

"Yes; if man can do it, I will bring them up in time. Shall you keep along the river?"

"Yes. You will hear our firing unless all is over. Go now, and remember, if you fail us, our blood be upon your head!"

Without a word the old hunter drew his belt tighter and then sped away, disappearing the next moment among the forest trees. As he said, if mortal man could accomplish the task, he would do it.

And then the little party pushed on with speed lent by despair. They knew that ere the haven of safety could be reached they would be overtaken and forced to make a stand.

The Miamis, when they found the change in their victims' course, would divine the truth, and without trying to follow the trail would dash ahead to cut the fugitives off from the block-house. Then it would be a struggle for life or death, with the odds fearfully against the whites.

CHAPTER XII.

HAND TO HAND.

For full an hour the little party fled at top speed down along the river-bank, and then, by the failing of Lottie and Mrs. Holmes, they were forced to slacken their pace to a slow walk. Mink Coat and Beauty led the way, while Wazecotah had fallen behind the better to guard against surprise.

Suddenly a loud yell, from not far behind them, startled the fugitives, and then Wazecotah came dashing up. They all saw that the crisis was now close at hand.

The Miamis had really acted as the chief predicted. Instead of following along the trail, they had struck by a more circuitous course into the woods, expecting thus to intercept the whites.

But miscalculating their speed, they had struck the trail, thus finding that their intended victims were still ahead of them. This it was that had drawn forth the angry yells.

"We must run for it," cried Wazecotah. "A quarter of a mile below is where we must make a stand, if at all. They cannot surround us, and must face our rifles openly. We can beat them off until help comes."

Under his lead, each man assisting a woman, the little party dashed on at renewed speed, while louder and more distinct came the vindictive yells from behind them, telling how rapidly the Indians were gaining.

"Here it is!" gasped Wazecotah, "and none too

soon. Let the women stand far back. We will keep them in safe."

The spot thus found was of peculiar formation. A long ravine or defile cut through a range of hills, being barely wide enough to allow a footman to pass without brushing the sides. At the point where Wazecotah had paused a narrow pass or cleft led from the left-hand side down to the bottom of the defile. Extending upward for a few yards, this ended in a circular indentation that seemed chiseled out of the solid rock. The overhanging crags and rocks prevented a shot from being obtained from the hill-top above, or indeed from any place except for a stretch of some twenty yards of the defile.

In this the little party crouched, and prepared their weapons for use. That these soon would be needed, none could doubt, for with wild yells the red-skins dashed on; and then as they flocked madly up the defile, Wazecotah gave the order to fire.

His rifle uttered the death-warrant of Wanou, while two others fell. Then, while they re-loaded, Mink Coat deliberately discharged his pistols.

A wild volley was fired by the Indians, as, cowed by the fall of their chief, they fell back in momentary confusion. With a low, gurgling groan, Mink Coat fell back, as if dead, with the blood gushing from his breast.

Hardin hastily dragged him up to where the women were, bidding them restore him if possible, while he returned to make good the defense of the defile. Scarcely were the weapons reloaded, than the onset came.

It was boldly met, but two shots could not check the demons who had recognized Wazecotah, and turned to punish the traitor. In the crowding, not one of the rifle-shots from the savages took effect, and then they pressed on to crush the daring defenders by mere weight of numbers.

Side by side the two men stood, with clubbed rifles, beating back the enemy, one after another, as they strove to scale the slippery pass. At every blow a foe fell back, dead or disabled.

Beauty was down amid the savages, nobly performing her part, though sadly outnumbered. And thus the struggle raged for fully five minutes; horrible, deadly strife, that could not last long.

CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAGIC TALE.

YOUTH seemed renewed in old Joe Brady as he dashed along through the forest, heading toward the frontier-post at which he expected to gather sufficient assistance to succor his friends, in case worst should come and they be forced to stand at bay, as he felt but little doubt would be the case.

The half-scared, vacant look was gone from his face now, and his senses were upon the keen alert. The danger that threatened those who in their youth and beauty so strongly reminded him of his loving Louisa, aroused his mind from the fog-like veil that had encompassed it of late.

Thus he sped onward, choosing the less tangled paths as if by instinct, eluding contact with pendant boughs or gnarled tree-trunks with marvelous dexterity, unheeding the pain caused by bleeding scratches or bruises, unmindful of fatigue, only thinking of those for whom he felt such a deep anxiety.

The sun shone hot and sultry: the leafy tree-tops scarce rustled with the fast-dying morning's breeze; the perspiration rolled in great drops from the hunter's person, and still he sped on, like some weird phantom of the wooded depths.

Then with a wild cry of terror, a human form sprang up from a log before Brady, and with one affrighted glance at the rigid features of the old hunter, turned and fled at break-neck speed. And that glance, so brief and fleeting, had also sufficed for Brady to recognize the fugitive.

All thoughts of his friends' peril were banished; the only thought of one thing—revenge. He saw before him one of those whom he had hunted steadily,

almost day and night, for years gone by; he recognized the fleeing form of Gabriel Burke, one of those concerned in the abduction of his daughter Louisa.

With a deep, hoarse cry of vindictive fury, the bereaved father darted forward after the fugitive robber. He forgot his fatigue; he ran as though still in his prime, and fresh of wind.

And Burke, too, sped along with a marvelous fleetness, lent by terror. He was naturally a daring, reckless man, but there had been something in his recent meeting with this avenger, that in a manner unstrung his nerves.

He could not boldly face the man whose entire life he had assisted to blight. Even had he been completely armed, the facts would have been the same. He would have fled as now.

The feet of one was winged with fear; those of the other by intense hatred. It was truly a race for life or death. No other ending would come from it.

Joe Brady's face was stern-set and almost expressionless. Only his eyes betrayed the intensity of his hatred. They blazed with a lurid, deadly light that boded ill for his foe.

The end came full soon. The foot of Burke caught against a projecting root, as his head turned to note the progress of his pursuer, and he was flung with stunning force to the ground. One more leap, and then with a shrill, blood-curdling yell of vindictive joy, the old hunter was upon him.

The bewildered refugee was as a very child in his hands. A giant could scarce have resisted successfully that maniacal force, and ere the senses of the outlaw were fully recovered from the shock, he was securely bound, hand and foot.

"Where is my child?" The avenger's tone was thrillingly fierce and high.

"Let me go, with my life, an' I'll tell ye all I know," answered the now trembling wretch.

"No—you need not plead; I have decided; die you shall!"

"You—you're goin' to murder me anyhow?"

"It is not murder—it is only justice. You ruined my life—you stole away my child—perhaps murdered her; and for all this you must pay. Tell me where she is—whether alive or dead?"

"You say I've got to die fer sure, so ef you want to find out anythin' 'bout thet gal o' yours, why, jest do it, ef you kin!"

"You are a fool, Gabe Burke," quietly responded Brady, with a peculiar smile that seemed to chill the very heart's blood of the borderer. "I can make you tell all you know, if you push me."

"How?" and an uneasy look crept into the doomed man's eyes.

"By torture! Now listen to me, and mark my words well. But first—you say that you are the only one who can tell me of my child?"

"Yas—you know it," gloomily replied Burke. "Si Roach, Hard Hackney an' Cap'n Al is all gone. Ef you wipe me out, then you'll never find out nothin' at all. I won't tell—durned ef I do, so do your murder! I'll only tell ye, ef ye promise to let me go free."

For answer Brady began scraping together a heap of dried leaves and small twigs, and then bending over them, he deliberately began striking fire. Burke watched his every motion like one fascinated.

The dry leaves caught fire from the smoldering punk, and then the avenger carefully fed the tiny blaze with twigs until the flame darted higher and grew more strong. Then Brady began sharpening his long-bladed knife, with all the cool adroitness of a professional butcher.

This proved too much for the unstrung nerves of Gabe Burke. He cried out in a weak and trembling tone:

"Hold on thar'—I'll tell!"

"I thought as much. It was nearly time," quietly added Brady, once more standing beside his captive.

"Ef I tell you the truth, will you let me go, then?"

"No."

"Will you *do it quick*, then—not sarve me like a cussed red-skin?"

"Yes. I promise you that. I will end it at one blow."

"You sw'ar it?"

"Go on—I have given you my word," impatiently cried Brady.

"So be it, then. But ef you go back on me, I'll ha'nt you till your dyin' day! I'll make your life a perfect hell. You needn't laugh—I'll do it. An' now lis'en. I'm goin' to talk right out flat-footed. You cain't do no more than kill me, nohow."

"I holped to kerry off your gal, for Captain Al—he sot us on an' paid us fer the job, but I've never felt right ever sence. Ef I'd 'a' only knowed how it was goin' to turn out, I'd a heap rather 'a' cut off my right hand than to 'a' did what I did. Wal, then—*your gal is dead!*"

Brady did not speak. He gazed keenly at his captive. The eyes of the latter met his fully and unflinchingly. He could read the truth afar down in their depths.

A pale grayish shade settled over the features of the old hunter. A choking sensation rose in his throat. He strove to speak, but the words refused to issue. He clutched convulsively at his throat and staggered back. But for the interposing trunk of a tree, he would have fallen to the ground.

"I didn't hev no hand in *thet*. I'm bad enough, but I wouldn't hurt a woman, so fur as *thet*. Ef I'd 'a' bin thar, it'd never 'a' happened. I'd 'a' killed him fust."

"It was when we was a-hidin' up in the hills. We hed kep' Cap'n Al, who hed come to lead us, and hed taken charge uv the gal, back from doin' her any harm ontill then, though he was hot enough at it, but we hed him at a pinch, an' told him thet he must merry her fust. Wal, one day he sent us all off, but Hard Hackney, to hunt around fer sign, an' he went too. Hard must 'a' got asleep, fer when he woke up, the gal was gone."

"He tuck her trail, an' bimeby kem out upon the boss who was a standin' over the dead gal. She d got loose somehow, an' I s'pect he'd bin watchin' fer jest some sech chaine. Anyhow, he'd met her, an' they'd hed some words an' a scuffle, sorter. She foun't him like a good one, as we could see by the ground, an' he'd got so mad thet he'd up an' hit her. He didn't mean to kill her, I know, 'ca'se he'd run too much resk fer thet. But he did do it. She was dead as a door nail."

Brady did not speak. He seemed frozen to a stone. Burke resumed in a low, sad tone:

"Wal, we tuck an' dug a hole an' put her in—thet is me 'n' Hard did, fer Carpenter he run away. Ef he'd 'a' stayed, I raily b'lieve we'd 'a' killed the or'nary cuss, we was so mad at him an' felt so sorry fer the gal. Then when we'd kivered her up, we went back to the hills an' hid ontill the road was cl'ar fer us to go to the nest. Thet is all I know 'bout her, an' it's as true as thet sun shines down on you 'n' me—it's the gospil truth, ef I do say so."

Brady roused himself with a start, and advanced toward Burke. He stooped over and gazed down into the bleared and watery eyes, as if he would read through them the secret heart's thoughts. The borderer met this scrutiny without flinching.

Then Joe Brady spoke, his voice sounding strained and unnatural:

"Gabe Burke, are you telling me the truth?"

"I sw'ar it—by my dead an' gone mother, who was the only pusson as ever loved me in this yere world. Ef I don't tell you the truth, then I hope she may cuss me to never come back ag'in!" solemnly affirmed the outlaw, and—strange sight!—two great tears slowly welled from his bloodshot eyes and stood trembling upon his cheeks.

"I believe you—I wish that I could spare your life—but I have sworn a sacred oath to kill you," slowly added the old hunter, as he drew his long knife.

"Strike! I ain't afeard no longer. I've did you a heap o' wrong, an' I reckon I desurve the wust you kin gi' me. I won't beg no more. Strike—on'y make it a good lick—don't haggle it," boldly cried Burke, and his eyes unflinchingly returned the stern gaze bent upon him.

With one hand Brady slowly bared the refugee's brawny chest, and sought out the evenly-beating heart. Then his right hand was raised aloft, clasp- ing the haft of the gleaming knife. The two enemies gazed keenly into each other's eyes.

"Don't fool—let her rip!" muttered Burke, as the glittering steel hung suspended in mid-air.

"You are not afraid?"

"Nary time—I *was*, but I ain't now," was the calm reply.

Then the heavy knife hissed through the air, and disappeared with a dull, heavy *thud*. A low cry broke upon the still air.

A cry, but not one of agony; a cry of surprise, of wonder. The blade, instead of piercing the heart of the refugee, was buried to the haft in the soft, yielding earth.

"I thought better o' you than thet, Joe Brady," said Burke, reproachfully, his lip quivering, as he gazed at the avenger. "You passed your word to do it up quick, an' this is the fust time I ever knowed o' your goin' back on it."

"You do not tremble—you speak steady and slow—ain't you afraid to die, Gabe Burke?" slowly responded Brady, passing one hand across his forehead.

"It's cur'ous—durned cur'ous!" muttered Burke, thoughtfully. "I don't feel afeard now, like I did. 'Pears like I didn't kee much fer nothin' no more. No, Joe Brady, I ain't scairt. Ef you mean to keep your word, go ahead. I kin look you in the eye, now thet I hev told you all about thet scrape."

"Then you're ready for your punishment? You're ready to *die*, Gabe Burke? You don't wish to live?"

"No, no, I didn't say *thet*. I meant thet ef it must come, I wouldn't hev it said that I died showin' of the white rag. No, life is sweet, even to sech as me. I would like to live a leetle longer, ef on'y to try and make up fer my sins, but I don't want to live bad enough to ax you to spar' my life ag'in."

Brady slowly drew his knife from its earthen sheath, and applied its keen edge to the cords that bound the refugee. Then he arose, and signed for Burke to do likewise. With a sorely puzzled countenance the latter did so, gazing wistfully at the pale, composed features of the old hunter.

"What does this yere mean, Joe Brady?" asked the outlaw finally, as the other appeared lost to all consciousness of his presence in a profound reverie.

"It means that I break my oath. You are free—go where you will. I shall never harm you, though you have sadly wronged me and mine. But you will repent—I know it—I see it in your face."

"You don't—honest Injun I'm free?" stammered Burke.

"Yes, you are free."

The strong borderer stood as if petrified for a moment. It was such a sudden change, when he had given up all earthly hope and nerved himself to meet death as a man.

He strove to speak, but the words clove to his throat. His fingers worked convulsively and his chest heaved. Then with an inarticulate cry he bowed his head and raised the hard, horny hand of the old hunter to his lips, wetting it with the hot tears of a man whose eyes had been undimmed by such visitors for many a long year.

"Joe Brady," at length uttered the subdued refugee, "I don't know what to say. I wish you hed driv' your knife as you started to do. It wouldn't 'a' hurt me hafe as bad as this hes did. I feel mean- er 'n pussley—durned ef I don't!"

"Let it pass, Burke; I saw I was wrong. Now go your way, and whenever you are tempted to sin again, just think of this day, and keep your hands clean."

"Whar be *you* goin' ef I may ax?"

"To the block—I had forgotten it all in meeting you. God forgive me if I am too late! I had forgotten them all!" groaned Brady, recollection of his neglected trust flashing upon his mind.

A few words revealed the truth to Burke, who added:

"Let me go 'long o' you, too. It'll be one more hand, I'll fight fer *you* a'ter this. My life is yourn. Whar you go, thar I go. I'll be your dog until I kin do somethin' to help wipe out that which I did afore. May I go 'long?"

"Yes; come on."

The two men turned and proceeded at a rapid rate through the forest, peering keenly in every direction in order to ascertain their exact location. In a few moments they noted a prominent landmark and then locating the block's position in their minds, they broke out into a long, steady lope, that carried them over the ground with truly surprising rapidity, considering their great exertion of the day. Then they disappeared in the woodland depths.

CHAPTER XIV.

MINK COAT UNMASKED.

It was a fearful moment.

The wildly yelling Miamis pressed madly up the narrow defile, burning to avenge their chief and other comrades, but in their very eagerness to annihilate their desperate foes, lay the main cause of their failure for so long.

They blocked the passage so that, more than once, not a savage could move; and at the best, their efforts to use their weapons were in vain, and only endangered their own lives. Thus the seeming marvel is explained, of how the two brave men beat back fully ten times their own number.

Side by side Hardin Ellis and Wazecotah fought, their powerful arms wielding the blood-stained and battered rifles with the force and regularity of piston rods. Side by side they guarded the key to their position—the narrow passage leading upward—and more than one dead or dying form rested upon the rocky bottom, rudely trampled under foot by the red-skins in their endeavors to wreak vengeance upon the borderers.

Suddenly a low, long-drawn, peculiar yell arose from the confused mass, and as if with one accord, the Miamis fell back down the defile, carrying with them their dead and disabled. This respite came opportunely, for the two defenders were fast weakening, and in a few more minutes must have succumbed from sheer fatigue.

"Load, Hardin—they will try it again—Sakima is with them!" hastily muttered Wazecotah, still speaking in English, apparently forgetful of his disguise.

A faint cry now came from the point where were collected the women, and Ellis hastily turned, fearing some unexpected calamity. He had recognized the voice of Minnie Holmes.

A wondering cry burst from his lips likewise, as his glance took in the scene before him. He could scarce believe his eyes.

He had hastily dragged Mink Coat, when the latter fell bravely fighting at his post, to the point where the women were sheltered, and hurriedly directed Minnie—by far the most collected and self-possessed of the group—to examine his wound, and, if possible, assuage the hemorrhage.

With hasty fingers she had removed the closely-fitting cap and cape of skins from the head and shoulders of the strange being, and then, with increasing wonder, had untied the thongs and parted the coat from over the breast.

The suspicions excited by a glimpse of the face and neck were now fully confirmed. She gazed down upon the white neck and bosom that could only belong to a woman. Indeed, the far-famed Mink Coat—the dreaded Death Shot—*was a woman!*

This was the view that met the astonished gaze of

Hardin Ellis. And his voice, so strange and unnatural, directed the attention of Wazecotah toward the spot.

Fortunate indeed was it that the Miamis did not seize this moment to renew the assault, for they would have found the post undefended. An easy victory would have been theirs.

Wazecotah gazed upon the clear-cut, regular features, now fully revealed by the removal of the disfiguring cap, with widely-dilated eyes. His entire form quivered like some storm-tossed shrub, and dreading lest he had received some fatal wound heretofore unnoticed, Hardin sprung to his side and caught the sinking form in his arms.

"My God! Wazecotah, are you hurt?" he cried, anxiously, as another cry broke from the lips of the disguised savage.

"No—no, but look! that face—my God! that face!" gasped the man, in a strained and husky voice, as he struggled erect.

"It is a woman!"

"Yes—it is my *Louisa*—my lost love! My God! do we meet, and thus? Dead—she is dead! My darling—my *Louisa!*" cried Wazecotah, or Clifford Ward, as he should now be termed, as he broke from the restraining grasp of the young settler, and rushing up the rock he flung himself down beside the senseless form of the being whom we have thus far known as Mink Coat, the Death Shot.

"*Louisa*—my *Louisa*, look up! Speak to me, darling—'tis your Clifford calls you. You are not dead—you cannot die—you *shall not* die! Wake up—open your eyes and smile upon me, if only to still this fearful pain at my heart. My darling—you do not speak—your cheek is cold—I do not see you breathe! Is this death? No—no, you are not dead! Tell me," he added, with an agonized look around upon the silent group, a fearful depth of horror echoing in his every word, "this is not death? She is alive—say she is alive! My *Louisa*, hear me—speak to me! She does not answer—my God! she is dead—dead! Oh!" and with a deep groan, as if welling up from a broken heart, the stricken man bowed his head upon the blood-stained bosom, his senses reeled and he fainted.

The blow had proven too much for him. The great excitement and fatigue undergone, the sudden revelation added to what he believed to be the death of his long-lost loved one, all united, proved more than he could bear.

"Here; take my flask—try to restore them. I must prepare for the Indians. Pray to God for help, Minnie, for I fear our last earthly hope is gone!" muttered Hardin Ellis, as he turned away and began to hastily recharge the fire-arms.

A heavy weight seemed pressing down upon his heart. He knew that another attack, if it came, would end in his defeat; it could be nothing else, now that his single arm was alone in opposing the enemy.

And yet he thought not for a moment of flight, though alone, there was but little danger that he could have effected his escape. But he would not abandon his charge. He would live or die with them.

There was only one faint hope left; oh! so faint! This was that the red-skins might pause to recover breath, or devise some more formidable plan for dislodging their stubborn quarry, and thus afford Joe Brady time to come up with the rescuing party from the block-house.

Alas! he little knew what had occurred to divert the old hunter from his mission, and perhaps it was better that he could not divine the truth. With that hope gone he would have been helpless indeed; now he resolved to hold out to the last moment, listening with painful intentness for the expected sound of sturdy cheers from the stout lungs of the rescuers, whom he did not doubt were already upon the back trail.

With marvelous quickness he recharged all the firearms, even to the pistols of Mink Coat. Thus he

possessed five shots; and he knew that at least as many of the enemy must fall ere he could be overpowered. These he could pick off before they could reach his stand; then he must struggle on as before.

He had but little time to ponder upon his situation, for the enemy were upon him. His keen eye detected the cautiously-approaching figure of a savage, crawling along the narrow defile, with the evident intention of surprising him by a sudden onset, and thus engage him hand-to-hand ere a chance was given to discharge his fatal rifle.

Hardin Ellis was not a man to hesitate long. He knew that with the first shot there would come a deadly rush forward upon the part of the Indians, and that he would have no time to spare. He resolved to make his mark before he was overpowered; to make the victory a costly one to the copper-skinned demons.

The heavy rifle rose to his cheek, and with the report a leaden bullet crashed through the brain of the doomed red-skin, who sprung into the air, with the horrible death-yell of his race. As Hardin had anticipated, this blow was the signal for the remainder to advance, and as he caught up his second rifle the entire pass seemed filled with the dusky miscreants, as if by magic, each one screeching and brandishing his weapons, as though seeking to intimidate the young borderer by these demonstrations.

They also noted that but one foeman confronted them. Evidently their recreant comrade, Wazecotah, had fallen. Thus encouraged they pressed on, unheeding the shots that carried death into their densely-crowded ranks.

Dropping the third rifle, Hardin clutched his pistols, and then the foe was upon him, at arm's length. Two quick reports, and then he hurled the empty pistols into the crowd, grasping his trusty rifle and hurling the foremost Indian, who had nearly gained the top of the ledge, back with a horribly shattered skull.

It was a fearful, thrilling scene. The young man battled desperately, but the task was far too great for one pair of arms. He used his feet with good effect, kicking those back from the ledge as they strove to crawl up it. But he was gradually being forced back from his stand.

Several Miamis had gained the ledge, despite his frantic struggles, and were pressing Hardin fiercely, when with a shrill yell another combatant took part in the *m-lee*. Cliff Ward had aroused from his swoon, but a moment too late. The golden opportunity was past; the ground could not be recovered now.

The disguised settler seized one brawny savage and lifting him sheer from the ground, hurled him with the force of a catapult into the midst of his comrades. The effort, however, proved fatal, for it brought the borderer to his knees.

Ere he could arise, a half-dozen savages had pounced upon him, and despite his frantic struggles, they succeeded in overpowering him. At nearly the same moment, a blow from behind felled Hardin Ellis to the ground, and the conflict was over.

Mad with rage and thirst for vengeance, a number of red-skins sprung up to where cowered the pale and trembling women, uttering fiendish yells and brandishing their weapons. One seized upon Mrs. Holmes, and raised his gleaming hatchet on high.

A loud, commanding voice rung out, but it came a moment too late. The instrument of death fell upon the bowed head, and without a groan, the ill-fated woman sunk forward, dead; the long gray locks fast crimsoning beneath the tide of life that flowed from the horribly shattered skull.

A strong arm hurled the Indian aside, and then the remainder slunk away, cowed and abashed before the anger of their chief, Sakima. That worthy had preserved the lives of the pale-faces, for the time being, but it was from no motives of mercy. The blood of his slaughtered braves cried out for

vengeance, but the loss had been by far too great to be atoned by such a simple sacrifice.

He had saved the lives of the pale-faces in order that they might *die at the stake!*

Sakima turned to where Cliff Ward was lying, securely bound, still panting from the furious struggle, with a look of deadly anger resting upon his copper-tinted visage. The borderer boldly met his glare, and then as the chief spoke, he listened with a smile of scorn.

"I see a dog before me who has stolen the skin of a Miami brave. Wazecotah is dead; a polecat stole his face and paint."

"Sakima speaks big words now, when Wazecotah's arms are bound, but before, he hid behind a rock. He feared to meet a *man* who had weapons in his hand," contemptuously retorted Cliff.

The chief turned away with a gesture of disdain, and drew near to the group of braves, who surrounded the still senseless form of Mink Coat, or Louisa Brady, as we must henceforth call her.

They appeared greatly excited. The peculiar dress told them that the dreaded scourge of their race lay before them; but the still exposed bosom betrayed the woman. Could it be that this was the one who had so fearfully punished their people? Was the dreaded demon, after all, but a *squaw*?

As Sakima stood over her, Louisa uttered a faint sigh and opened her eyes. She gazed around her for a moment in bewildered surprise. A dazed look rested upon her features. Evidently she was at a loss to conjecture what had occurred.

Sakima spoke a few words to one of his braves, who at once proceeded to examine the wound, and although the woman again fainted beneath his rude surgery, his verdict was evidently favorable. In a short time the wound was bandaged, and then the party slowly defiled down the pass, carrying with them their captives and the dead Indians.

A rude litter was hastily manufactured, and upon it Louisa was placed. Then the limbs of Ward and Ellis were released sufficiently to enable them to walk.

Sakima gave a few hurried directions to a few braves, who fell back alongside the dead Miamis. A guard closely encircled the captives, and the line of march was taken up, heading toward the captured nest of the refugees.

A glance passed between Hardin Ellis and Cliff Ward. Each felt a ray of renewed hope spring up in their hearts. They saw that Sakima had no fear of danger, as he took no pains to conceal the trail, that, necessarily, lay broad and distinct behind them.

It would be easily followed, especially when such a skillful scout and trailer as old Joe Brady was upon the search. He had had ample time to reach the block-house, and in all probability was, ere this, upon the back track. He would find the trail, and by following it, concoct some means to save his friends, if main force could not succeed.

Well skilled in the traits of the race with whom he had passed years of his life, Ward felt assured that the contemplated sacrifice would not take place before the shades of night had settled down upon the earth, if indeed it was not postponed until the marauding savages had all returned to their village.

If the latter, it would go hard, but he managed to effect an escape and liberate his companions. As if Sakima had read this thought the chief said:

"When the sun goes to rest, the dog who stole Wazecotah's paint shall die the death of fire. He will have company to keep him from being lonesome upon the long trail. But *they* will go to fill the lodges of the Miamis," and the hoary villain nodded toward the women.

Ward did not speak. His eyes were riveted upon the pale and ghastly features of his long-lost love. He could see she still lived, but it seemed to him that each feeble, fluttering breath would be the end—that each rude jostle of the litter would separate the spirit from its earthly tenement.

It was a bitter trial for him to repress the groan of agony that rose to his lips, but the past years had taught him wondrous self-control, and he knew that any sympathy he might betray for her, would only prove to her disadvantage. His sin was a heinous one, in the eyes of the Miamis, and nothing would be spared, if by it a single additional pang or torture could be inflicted upon him.

So he schooled his features, and only smiled at the threats; a smile that angered the choleric chieftain, but whose self-respect, or rather that pride in self-control that an Indian ever feels, kept him from maltreating a prisoner, much as he might have felt inclined to do otherwise.

The party seemed in no particular hurry, accommodating their pace to that of the women, and thus it was fully two hours before the vicinity of the nest was gained. This was still standing, although shattered and blackened, bearing significant scars of the siege it had so recently undergone.

Ward and Ellis were bound to the trunks of neighboring trees, so close together that they were enabled to converse in low tones. The women were placed at a little distance, under special guard.

Greatly to the disgust of the more dextrous-fingered braves, Sakima ordered all the plunder to be deposited in one common pile, from thence to be distributed as his fancy should dictate. It was with mingled feelings that Cliff Ward scanned this collection. There was one thing lacking, and he scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry.

The larder of the refugees had been plentifully stored with edibles and potables, which were now scattered around the ground in careless profusion. The Miamis after expressing their delight at their latest acquisition—the captives—addressed themselves to these, and the scene speedily became uproarious, Sakima himself not disdaining to participate in a not very decorous dance of triumph over their signal success in arms.

The situation of the captives was fast becoming critical in the extreme. Only the will of Sakima had thus far withheld the tomahawks and scalping-knives from their devoted heads, and now, even his sullen, treacherous eyes were beginning to sparkle and dwelt ominously upon the hated pale-faces.

One word from him—a single motion would set the ball in action, and then the massacre, once begun, would only end in the extermination of the captives. Truly, their situation was not to be envied.

The orgies waxed more furlous and disgusting, when another cause for alarm became evident. A savage, reeling and yelling in drunken hilarity, caught up a brand of fire, and flung it against the building. The brand fell to the ground, upon a pile of dried brush and splintered wood, and in another moment it burst into a blaze.

No one save the captives appeared to notice this; the red-skins were fully occupied in gorging themselves. But Cliff Ward beheld the impending peril with feelings of horror.

Not for himself, though since his last discovery—since he knew that his loved one still lived—life had acquired new charms for him; but he thought of her. It was her peril that startled him. And yet he dared not draw toward them the attention of the maddened red-skins, whose first answer would most probably be a hatchet stroke or a knife thrust, by telling them of his fears.

He remembered what Louisa—then Mink Coat—had told them regarding the *kegs of powder* stowed away beneath the building.

He knew that there was enough to blow the building to atoms, and among the storm of ragged missiles, how many of their number would escape with life?

The building could not burn down without igniting this powder. The entire hillside would be torn asunder, as by an earthquake; masses of rocks would be hurled far and near. Death stared them in the face

from every side, and yet the only mode of preventing this was impracticable.

The doomed nest burned on. The logs were nearly seasoned, and caught readily. The flames roared and darted out its serpent-like tongues as though seeking other victims than those dead and mangled bodies that lay still and motionless in their midst. The dark smoke rolled aloft in huge columns, that seemed to dim the brightness of the sun.

The Miamis yelled and shrieked around the glowing pile in drunken glee, unheeding the intense heat, that drew the perspiration from the captives, who gazed upon the wildly thrilling scene in awe-struck silence. The danger had been whispered from one to another, and the women had gradually drawn nearer the two men, as though feeling safer in their vicinity.

The guards still hovered near them, but they, too, were infected by the spirit of the scene; and feeling assured that Sakima was by far too drunk to notice their disobedience, they had possessed themselves of a supply of the coveted fire-water, that was fast reducing them to a level with their comrades.

The prisoners kept their eyes riveted upon the blazing building. That the crisis was near, none could doubt. And then—what would be the result?

Ward glanced at the pale face of Louisa, who still occupied the litter, and sighed. He feared for her—not himself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE COUP DE GRACE.

MEANWHILE Joe Brady had not been idle, but strove nobly to redeem his fault and make up for lost time. Followed by the penitent refugee, Gabe Burke, he did not slacken his pace until the frontier block was reached, and then in faint, breathless tones he made known his mission.

Fortunately the post was strong-handed, and some fifteen men, all stout, true-hearted borderers, volunteered to accompany him. Undaunted by his severe toil, Brady at once set out upon his return, leading by the most direct route, along which he hoped to meet the fugitives, in case they had not been forced to stand at bay.

Two hours' travel brought them to the defile so often alluded to, where Wazecotah told him he might expect to find them, and his quick eye read the truth in an instant. He saw that a struggle had taken place, in which the red-skins had been the victors; he saw the blood-stains and spots where dead bodies had lain.

He glided up the defile while others hunted for the departing trail of the Miamis. He wished to learn, if possible, who had been killed and who taken prisoners, if any, before proceeding further. An involuntary cry of horror broke from his lips as he gazed upon the spot of death where the two men had battled so desperately; he noted the dead form of the wolf, Beauty; then he saw the form of a woman further up the rocks.

The gray hair—what little had escaped the scalping-knife—told him who was the victim, and then, with her in his arms, Brady retraced his steps to where he had left his companions. These had easily found the trail, and learned that there were a number of captives.

The body of the murdered woman was placed in a hastily scooped out hole, and then covered with rocks, to preserve it from any prowling beast. They could not spare more time to this; the duty they owed the living was more sacred.

When they looked from this mournful task, a simultaneous cry broke from the lips of all. A dense cloud of smoke was seen curling far above the tree-tops. Brady had little difficulty in accounting for it. The location told him it was the outlaws' nest.

"We must make haste, boys," he cried, excitedly, as he dashed off through the forest in the direction

of the tell-tale cloud. "The sight of that fire may put the infernal imps into the notion of burning our friends to save trouble."

Burke dashed up alongside the old hunter and hissed a few words in his ear. The scout uttered a wild cry of horror and increased his speed. The refugee had mentioned the hidden store of powder.

The others gained an inkling of the truth, though Burke feared to betray how he had gained his knowledge, lest the hatred they entertained toward the scourge—for such indeed had the refugees proved themselves—should wreak itself upon him. And each man strained every nerve to its utmost tension in order to arrest, if possible, the threatened catastrophe.

When the head of the ravine was reached, they were forced to proceed with more caution, lest they should be discovered, and as the enemy outnumbered them, their hopes of rescuing their friends be rendered futile. Ahead of them dashed Gabe Burke. He had resolved upon a desperate move; the events of that day had greatly changed his entire nature.

He entered the tunnel and rushed to the spot where lay the powder. The passage was brilliantly lighted up. The burning brands were already falling around the spot, and one of the kegs was fairly in a blaze. He stripped off his flannel shirt and smothered the flames; his skin scorched and shriveled beneath the intense heat, but he did not heed it.

One by one he rolled the kegs beyond all danger of the fire, and then as the entire building fell inward with a thundering crash, he sunk forward upon the kegs in a death-like swoon.

Joe Brady led his men along the pass at a rapid rate, until the mouth of the ravine was reached, and then through the screen of shriveled bushes, they peered out upon the scene before them. It was wild and thrilling!

The ruined building, burning fiercely, the forms of the half-nude Indians dancing around the glade in drunken glee, screeching and yelling in diabolical tones! or else, of weaker minds, lying around in sprawling attitudes, overcome by the potent liquor. Sakima and several others were rudely tearing the garments from Ward and Ellis. There could be no mistaking the intentions of the Indians. They were preparing their victims for the fiery sacrifice!

The three women, Minnie, Lottie and Louisa, the latter still in the garb of Mink Coat—were kneeling together, pale and trembling, fearing to move, though now unguarded. At their feet crouched the terrified boy, too greatly alarmed to cry.

This was the sight that met the eyes of the rescuers, and their resolve was at once taken. They saw that no time was to be lost. Never would they have a better opportunity for effecting their object. It seemed as though Providence was working right into their hands—the drunken savages were at their mercy.

Joe Brady singled out three men, and told them the one each was to select as a target. He chose Sakima for himself. These four, who were all who were near the captives, once disposed of, a sudden rush would cut the remainder off from any access to the helpless ones. The other borderers were to fire at the more sober red-skins, and then press on to hand-to-hand strife. There scarcely seemed a possibility of failure now.

Then the order was given, and a deadly volley rung out upon the confused air. A horrible tumult followed. Shrieks, groans and death-yells

were mingled with affrighted cries from the survivors, and also from the captive women, who feared some new calamity.

"Out and at 'em! Give the red imps jesse!" howled Brady, as he leaped into the glade, clubbing his rifle and rushing to cut off all approach to the pale-faces.

The four Miamis had fallen dead. Scarce one of the sixteen rifles but had claimed its victim. The surviving red-skins scarce thought of resistance. Some fled, but unsteadied by excess of liquor, were no match for the well-trained, hardy borderers, who slew them without mercy. Others were too drunken to realize their danger, but still hugged to their bosom, the subtle demon that had stolen away their senses, until the heavy rifle-butt—the keen knife or tomahawk, put a period to their lives.

It was a pitiless massacre; but the avengers had often been bitterly wronged; a thirst for blood had filled their hearts, and for the time rendered them demons.

As Joe Brady rushed forward, Louisa uttered a wild cry and sprung into his arms. The borderer stood as if dumfounded. He could not believe his eyes; it seemed some phantom—not his long-lost daughter that he clasped in his arms.

Then overpowered by her manifold trials, Louisa sunk into a swoon. She awoke to find bending over her the two persons most dear upon earth to her: her father, and her lover, Clifford Ward. The latter had removed the dye from his person, and now stood as she had known him last, only a little more worn and aged than of old.

With her recovery, Louisa also awoke in her right mind; the cloud that had so long enshrouded her senses, vanished as suddenly as it had come. Her story fully corroborated that of Carpenter and Gabe Burke. In resisting insult she had received a fearful blow upon the head, and then all that followed after was a dark blank, until now.

How she had recovered sufficiently to cast off the light covering of earth and crawl away from her grave; why she had assumed the strange garb that stamped her as Mink Coat, she could not tell. It was a mystery never to be cleared up.

After the death of Sakima, the head of the insurrection, the Indians soon quieted down, and peace was once more restored. The cabin of poor unfortunate Andrew Holmes was renovated, and there Hardin Ellis and his wife, the fair, true-hearted Minnie, settled down.

In the woodland shade hard by was one grave, that contained those who had loved so truly through life. In death husband and wife were not separated.

Gabriel Burke soon recovered from his severe bruises, although he was disfigured for life, and the lesson taught him by the avenger was never forgotten. He lived long, a true and reformed man, the close and inseparable companion of the old hunter, who learned to love, as ardently as he had once hated him.

They found a home beside that of Clifford Ward and Louisa, who, united after such deadly peril and bitter trials, enjoyed many years' life, rendered all the more happy from contrast with those terrible days gone by.

Lottie Henderson returned to her friends from whom she had been stolen, and soon after married an honest young settler, who never had cause to regret his choice.

And thus we leave them, in peace and happiness, after a season of trial and tribulation, such as, fortunately, seldom falls to the lot of human beings.

THE END.

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